TERROR

THE VERY BEST OF

TWISTED TALES

HORROR TALES FROM THE EIGHTIES!

TWISTED TALES

CONTENTS

STORIES FROM TWISTED TALES #1-10

ORIGINAL ARTWORK

HOUSE ADVERTISEMENTS

INFECTED

THE NATIVES CALLED THEM ***VIENTO DE FUEGO***-- "FIREWIND". SOUTH OF ARROYO GRANDE THEY WERE KNOWN AS ***SANTANA ... DIABLO...*** OR , MOST COMMONLY, THE ***SANTA ANA***. WHATEVER YOU CALLED THEM, THEY BLEW INCESSANTLY, MOANING THROUGH THE THE CANYONS, GUSTING ACROSS THE PLAINS. MIX THEM WITH THE IONS IN THE AIR AND THEY CAUSED -- FOR SOME UNFORTUNATES -- MIGRANES. YOU ARE ONE OF THE UNFORTUNATES ...

NUTS.
YOUR NAME IS OSCAR FELPS. YOUR HEAD HURTS. YOUR FEET HURT. YOUR BACK HURTS. YOU'RE SICK OF THIS CRUMMY JOB ... THIS CRUMMY WIND ...
YOU TURN FROM THE COOL FROTHING SURF, WALK TO THE OVEN OF YOUR CAR. A BROWNISH LUMP SCUTTLES PAST YOUR SHOE. LUCKY LITTLE CRAB. HE GOES BACK TO THE TEEMING SEA ... YOU GO BACK TO THE EMPTINESS OF YOUR JOB ...
CORB
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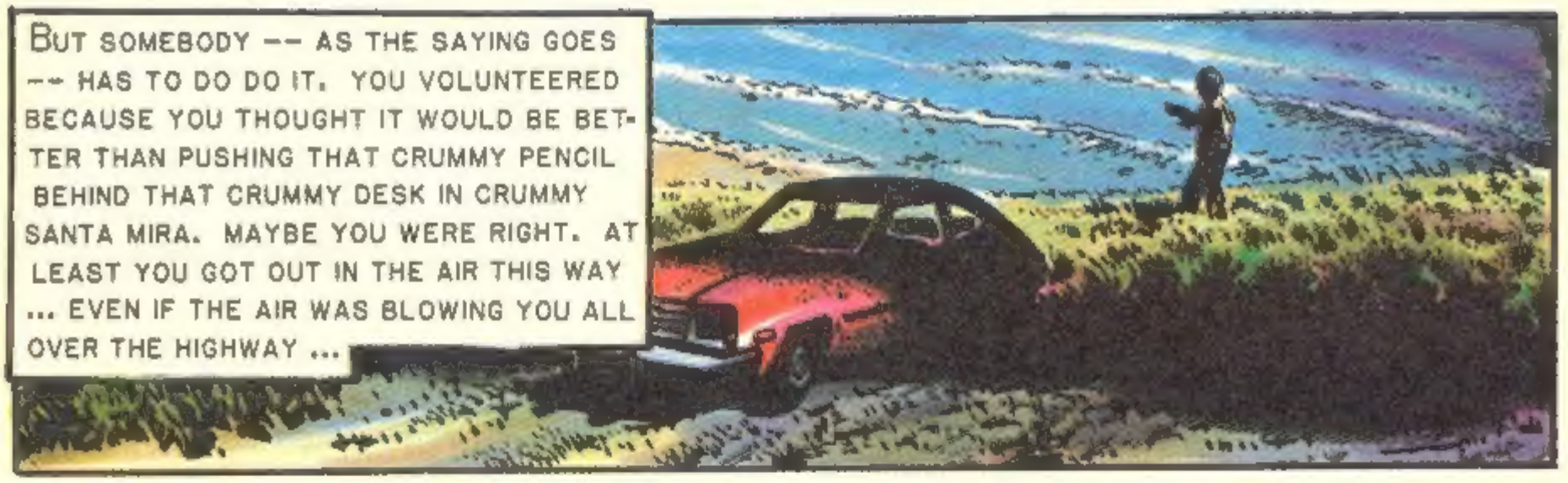
STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: RICHARD CORBEN
Colors: Steve Oliff

BUT SOMEBODY -- AS THE SAYING GOES -- HAS TO DO DO IT. YOU VOLUNTEERED BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD BE BETTER THAN PUSHING THAT CRUMMY PENCIL BEHIND THAT CRUMMY DESK IN CRUMMY SANTA MIRA. MAYBE YOU WERE RIGHT. AT LEAST YOU GOT OUT IN THE AIR THIS WAY ... EVEN IF THE AIR WAS BLOWING YOU ALL OVER THE HIGHWAY ...



WELL, NO SENSE BITCHING ABOUT THAT NOW, THE HEADACHE IS BAD ENOUGH ALREADY. IT'S ALMOST FOUR O'CLOCK. YOU HAVE TWO MORE STOPS TO MAKE BEFORE YOU CAN POP A COLD TOP, LAY IN A COOL TUB, AND FLIP THROUGH THIS MONTH'S 'PLAYBOY'...

YOU WINCE BACK THE PAIN IN YOUR SKULL , HEAVE A WEARY SIGH, AND NOSE THE CAR SOUTH TOWARD LOS OLIVOS. YOU CHECK THE CLIPBOARD ON THE SEAT BESIDE YOU: THE SANTOS FAMILY. WETBACKS, NO DOUBT. GOD, HERE WE GO AGAIN...

AN HOUR LATER YOU'RE EDGING INTO A CRUDE DRIVEWAY, LITTERED WITH BROKEN TOYS AND FADED MILK CARTONS. YOU GAZE UP AT A DELAPIDATED, PAINT-PEELING, ONE ROOM SHACK. YOU CAN ALREADY GUESS AT ITS CONTENTS...

PART OF ITS CONTENTS STAND SILENTLY AMONG THE RUSTED BICYCLE FRAMES AND SKITTERING GARBAGE, DARK, WIDE, ALMOND EYES WATCHING YOU QUIETLY, TATTERED RAG DOLLS CLUTCHED IN THEIR HANDS...

SOMETHING DARTS FROM THE SHADOWS BENEATH THE HOUSE, SOMETHING BROWN AND MANGY AND LOUD. A LENGTH OF ROPE CHECKS ITS TEETH FROM SINKING INTO YOUR ANKLES...

THE SANTOS 'FAMILY' CONSISTS OF ONE HARRIED MOTHER IN HER LATE THIRTIES, FIVE OR SIX SCREAMING, BROWN-SKINNED CHILDREN, A YAPPING MOCKERY OF A CANINE, AND NO HUSBAND. MRS. SANTOS IS ON WELFARE... FOREVER...

CHES?

MRS. SANTOS? MY NAME IS OSCAR FELPS, I'M FROM NATIONAL CREDIT COLLECTION AGENCY...

WHAT JEW WANT?

ACCORDING TO OUR RECORDS, MRS. SANTOS, YOU ARE DELINQUENT IN PAYMENT FOR THE LAST SIX --

I TOLE DA MON ON DA PHONE! WE GOT NO ***MAH-NEY!*** JEW GO ***WAY!*** LEBE US ***LONE!***

IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME. THE NAMES MAY DIFFER, THE LOCATIONS ALTER SLIGHTLY, BUT THE RESULT IS THE SAME...

MRS. SANTOS, MY COMPANY HAS BEEN EXTREMELY LENIENT IN YOUR CASE AND--

WHAT JEW WONT ME TO DEW? JEW CON GIT BLHUD FHRAM A TULIPI WE GOT NO ***MAH-NEY! COMPRENDE?*** WE ***BUSTED!***

THE BABY IN HER ARMS BEGINS TO SCREAM, PROBABLY FROM HUNGER. IT ADDS ITS OWN HIDEOUS PAIN TO THE ALREADY-BURGEONING AGONY POUNDING IN YOUR HEAD. YOU'RE GOING TO LOSE ANOTHER ONE...

MRS. SANTOS, PLEASE, I--

WHY DON JEW TRY RAISIN SIX KEDS ON FOOD STAMPS SOMETIME, MISTURE? HAH? WHY DON JEW TRY ET?

THE CEASELESS WIND WHIPS AT YOUR HEAD, THE WOMANS'S TWISTED LIPS FORM AN ENDLESS STREAM OF DISCONNECTED RAVINGS, THE CHILD'S WAIL RISES HIGHER THAN THE SCREAMING SANTA ANA, TEARING AT THE PIT OF YOUR GUTS...

... TEARING... TEARING...

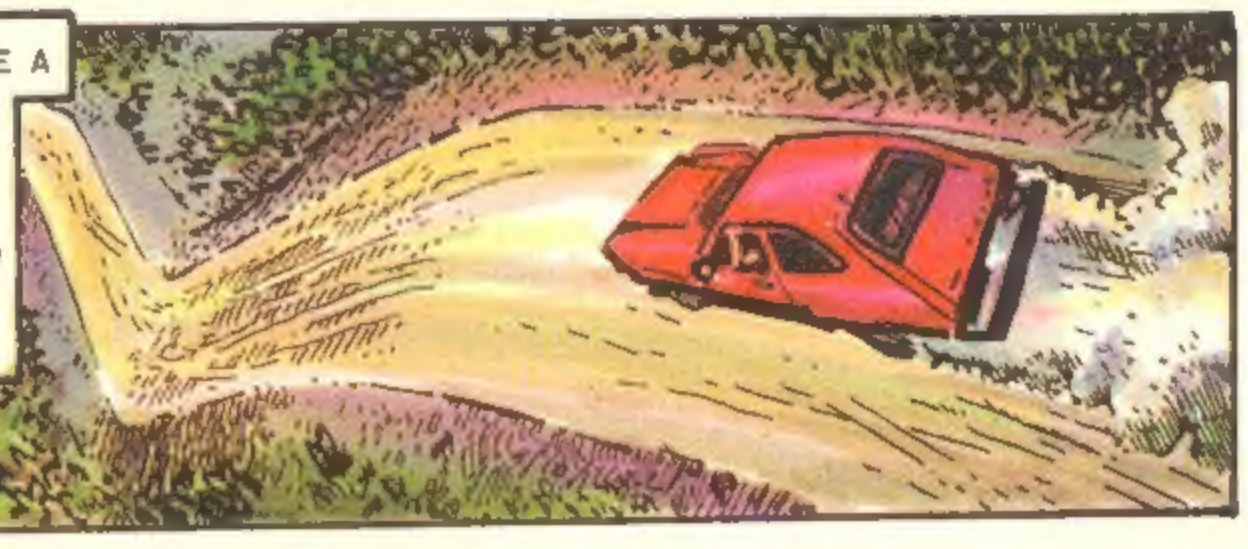
...TEARING...

...TEARING...

YOU TRY TO MAKE IT TO THE STEERING WHEEL, TO THE SOFT FOAMING WATERS OF THE BEACH. THE CLEAN SALTY AIR OF THE OCEAN FAR AWAY... BUT THE TEARING IN YOUR GUTS WON'T LET YOU. YOU MAKE IT ONLY TO THE RUSTED BACK FENDER BEFORE EVERYTHING BREAKS LOOSE...

YOU DRAG A SHAKING CLAW ACROSS YOUR MOUTH AND WIPE AWAY THE SOUR SMELLING BILE. THE HOWLING WIND SEEMS TO SHRIEK WITH MOCKING LAUGHTER AS YOU PLUNGE INTO THE SANCT--ITY OF THE FRONT SEAT AND PEEL AWAY FROM THE HORROR BEHIND YOU...

A HALF HOUR LATER THINGS ARE A BIT BETTER. THE RAVAGING HEADACHE HAS CALMED TO A DULL POUNDING. THE UNCON-TROLLABLE SHAKING HAS SLACKENED ENOUGH TO ALLOW YOUR JAMMING A CIGARETTE BETWEEN YOUR PALE LIPS...



THERE'S ONE MORE NAME ON YOUR CLIPBOARD LIST: MARIA DELGADO. BUT YOU'RE NOT EVEN CONSIDERING CHECKING ON IT. YOU NEED A DRINK. YOU NEED A LOT OF DRINKS. *BAD...*

IT'S THEN THAT YOU SEE HER FOR THE FIRST TIME...

... WALKING ALL ALONE... ALL ALONE THERE ON THE HOT, EMPTY DESERT HIGHWAY...

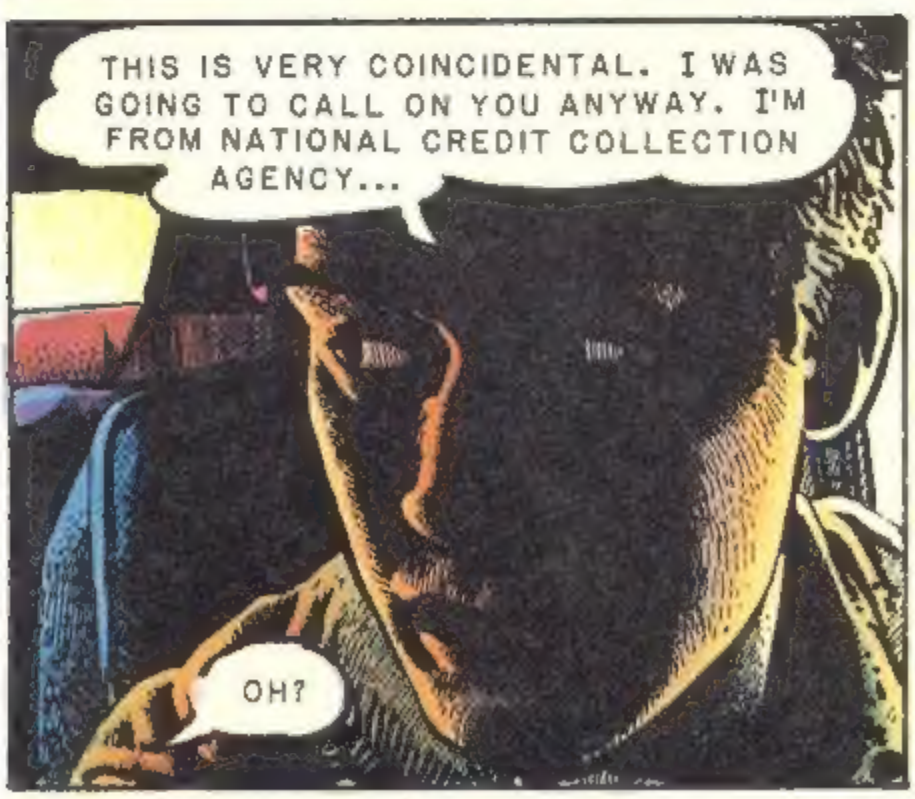
YOUR THROAT IS SUDDENLY VERY DRY... BUT NOT FROM THE HOT, INCESSANT WIND... FROM SOMETHING ELSE... YOU SLOW THE CAR...

SHE HARDLY NOTICES YOU. HER PALE BLUE EYES ARE DISTANT...ALMOST CLOUDY. A WARNING BELL SOUNDS IN YOUR BRAIN... BUT YOU'RE WEARY OF THE DAY... YOU COULD USE A DIVERSION... THIS LOOKS WORTH PURSUING...

SHE TURNS THEN AND YOUR CHEST CATCHES. YOU'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING SO LOVELY. SHE STRIDES GRACEFULLY TO THE WINDOW... BENDS DOWN, PALE BREASTS STRAINING AGAINST THE THIN FABRIC OF HER DRESS...

SHE SLIDES IN BESIDE YOU. A STRONG, SWEET PERFUME FILLS THE CAR. YOUR HAND TREMBLES ON THE GEARSHIFT AS YOU PULL FREE OF THE SHOULDER...

MARIE DELGADO! THE GIRL ON YOUR LIST! BUT SHOULD YOU TELL HER WHO YOU ARE? IT MIGHT PUT HER OFF... THEN AGAIN, IT MIGHT PROVE VERY CONVENIENT... AFTER ALL, IT DOES GIVE YOU A CERTAIN SENSE OF ***POWER...***



ACCORDING TO OUR RECORDS, YOU'RE DELINQUENT IN YOUR PAYMENTS, MRS. DELGADO...
IT'S MISS DELGADO... AND I... I'VE HAD SOME SEVERE HARDSHIPS OF LATE... SOME SEVERE PERSONAL PROBLEMS...

SO YOJNG... SO LOVELY... SO ***UNMARRIED!*** PLAY IT COOL, FELPS, YOU MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING HERE....

PERHAPS YOU'D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT THEM...

OH, NO... I'M... IT'S SO PERSONAL... COULDN'T YOU GIVE ME SOME MORE ***TIME?***... I'D BE SO ***GRATEFUL***...

"SO ***GRATEFUL***"... IT'S THE WORD YOU'VE BEEN WAITING TO HEAR...

WELL... PERHAPS WE ***COULD*** ARRANGE SOMETHING... YOU SAY YOUR HOUSE IS NEARBY?

JUST DOWN THE ROAD... BUT... I... THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD KNOW... I... I'VE HAD...

SHE WHISPERS THE WORD IN YOUR EAR SHYLY. YOU LAUGH, ADOLESCENT MEMORIES OF ITCHING PAIN FLARING IN YOUR MIND...

IT... IT'S (SOB) BEEN TERRIBLE! I'M SO ASHAMED!

HA-HA! HECK, THAT'S NOTHING TO GET UPSET ABOUT! LOTS OF FOLKS HAVE BEEN THROUGH THAT.

THEY HAVE?

POOR KID. SHE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF HERSELF. LORD... THESE IGNORANT SMALL-TOWN FOLK...

YOU ... YOU SAID YOU ***HAD*** THEM. YOU GOT ***RID*** OF THEM, I TAKE IT?

THEY'RE GONE FOR NOW. BUT THEY ALWAYS COME BACK... I'M SO EMBARRASSED...

HERE'S WHERE I LIVE, MISTER...

NICE LITTLE PLACE. (AHEM) MAYBE I OUGHT TO COME IN FOR AWHILE...

COME IN? B-BUT I TOLD YOU... I HAD--

LOOK, HONEY, OSCAR FELPS ISN'T GOING TO BE BOTHERED BY A LITTLE THING LIKE THAT. C'MON NOW, HOW 'BOUT A NICE COOL DRINK? EH?

YOUR FOOT KICKS INTO A RUBBER TOY ON THE FRONT LAWN...

UH... HOW MANY KIDS YOU GOT, MISS DELGADO?

SEVERAL, I'M AFRAID. THEY'RE DOWN AT THE BEACH RIGHT NOW.

THE HOUSE IS COOL AND STILL AFTER THE DRIVING WIND. YOU STEP INSIDE... THE ODOR ASSAILS YOUR NOSTRILS...

THAT (CHOKE) SMELL... LIKE SEAWEED...

IT'S THE CHILDREN. THEY FILL THE HOUSE WITH IT. (SIGH) I CAN'T EVEN HAVE VISITORS ANYMORE SINCE THE CHILDREN...

SHE BRINGS YOU A COOL DRINK. AFTER AWHILE THE SMELL DOESN'T SEEM SO BAD... BUT THE POUNDING OF YOUR HEART IS WORSE THAN EVER... SHE'S DRIVING YOU MAD...

COME HERE, MARIE...

NO, PLEASE! DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME? I TOLD YOU WHAT I HAD!

I DON'T CARE ABOUT *THAT* YOU SILLY FOOL! COME HERE!

HER SKIN IS LIKE HEATED SATIN BENEATH YOUR FINGERS. HER HAIR LIKE GOLDEN SILK. HER LIPS... HER LIPS...

OH...

MARIE...

THE SKIMPY DRESS COMES AWAY FROM HER LUSH FORM LIKE FADED PETALS... YOU LIFT HER IN YOUR STRONG ARMS, CARRY HER THROUGH THE SHADOWED HOUSE INTO THE BEDROOM...

YOU'VE GOT TO LEAVE BEFORE DARK... BEFORE THE CHILDREN COME BACK... PROMISE ME...

I PROMISE, I PROMISE!

THE WIND BUFFETS THE FRAIL HOUSE LIKE A GIANT'S HAND, STIFLING HER MOANS OF PAIN... OF PLEASURE...

... AND THE AFTERNOON WEARS ON... AND ON...

IT IS DARK WHEN YOU AWAKEN. THE GIRL SLUMBERS QUIETLY BESIDE YOU. THE WIND HAS FINALLY DIED DOWN A BIT. YOU ARISE, SEARCHING FOR THE BATHROOM...

YOU START ACROSS THE SHADOWED FLOOR. SOMETHING GIGGLES IN THE DARKNESS, SCUTTLES PAST YOUR LEGS. THE CHILDREN HAVE RETURNED FROM THE BEACH. LITTLE PESTS! WERE THEY WATCHING YOU?

YOU FIND THE BATHROOM DOOR, STEP INSIDE. SOMETHING GIGGLES BY THE SINK. YOU REACH OUT FOR THE SWITCH BUT CAN'T FIND IT. NO MATTER. YOU GRASP FOR THE FAUCET... A SEARING PAIN FILLS YOUR HAND...

WHAT TH--

YOU BACK INTO THE SWITCH ACCIDENTALLY. LIGHT FLARES THE BATHROOM INTO BRILLIANCE. THE HIDEOUS THING IS PERCHED ON THE LIP OF THE SINK, STUDYING YOU WITH CRUEL LITTLE EYES. ITS PINCER-CLAWS ARE RED...

¡JESUS!--

THAT'S WHEN YOU HOLD UP YOUR HAND...

AGGGHH!

YOU SCREAM INSANELY AND RUSH BACK DOWN THE HALL. THE HALL IS FILLED WITH SCUTTLING NOISES, GIGGLING. A TERRIBLE PAIN LANCES UP YOUR LEGS. YOU FALL, SCREECHING, WRITHING...

MARIE!

SOMETHING WET AND REEKING WITH SEAWEED SMELL LANDS ON YOUR BACK, PINNING YOU. SOMETHING ELSE CLAMBERS CRAB-LIKE ACROSS YOUR FLAILING ARMS. IMPOSSIBLE PAIN ROCKETS THROUGH YOUR SHOULDERS...

MARIE!

YOU FIND THE BEDROOM AT LAST. SHE'S STANDING THERE, TALL, PALE AND BEAUTIFUL, ONE OF THE HIDEOUS CRAB-CHILDREN CLUTCHED TO HER BOSOM, SUCKLING. IT'S THE LAST THING YOU SEE BEFORE THE FILM OF RED CLOUDS YOUR EYES FOREVER...

I TOLD YOU TO GO... I TOLD YOU...

I TOLD YOU WHAT I *HAD* MISTER, I *TOLD* YOU...

R

THE PALE, BALEFUL EYE OF THE OCTOBER MOON PEEKED HESITANTLY THROUGH THE RAGGED LINE OF CLOUDS, CASTING ITS LUMINOUS GLOW OVER THE DESERTED CAMP GROUNDS. THE ROSY-CHEEKED, LONG-LEGGED, GIGGLING BATTALION OF YOUNG GIRLS IN THEIR FLASHING WHITE CAMP GRANADA T-SHIRTS HAD LONG DEPARTED, TRADING THE SPARKLING LAKE AND ROLLING ARCHERY COURSE FOR THE DREARY TEDIUM OF HIGH SCHOOL CLASS ROOMS AND TEACHERS' FACES. THE AUTUMN BREEZE SIGHED ITS LONELINESS OVER THE PLACID SURFACE OF LAKE GRANADA. DOWN BELOW ITS DUN-COLORED DEPTHS A FAT WALL-EYE LINGERED CURIOUSLY OVER THE SHIFTING MUD AT THE LAKE'S BUTTOM. SOMETHING STIRRED IN THE THICK SLUDGE. SOMETHING WHITE AND ROTTED AND OBSCENE POKED ITS WAY UPWARD FROM THE MUCK TOWARD THE GENTLY ROLLING SURFACE... SOMETHING LONG DEAD... YET HIDEOUSLY ALIVE...

OUT OF HIS DEPTH

ALFREDO P. ALCALA

SKELETAL FINGERS GROPED UPWARD FOLLOWED BY A MAGGOTY, DECAYED FOREARM, TATTERED REMNANTS OF SHIRT SLEEVE, AND AT LAST THE GRINNING MOCKERY OF A HUMAN FACE...

IN MOMENTS THE THING STOOD FREE OF ITS WATERY GRAVE, SWAYING UNCERTAINLY ON [illegible] LIFTED ITS LIVID HEAD, AS IF SENSING DIRECTION. SPONGE-LIKE PARTICLES OF PUTRESCENT FLESH FLOATED AWAY IN THE CURRENT. THEN THE THING TURNED EASTWARD AND BEGAN TO MOVE...

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: ALFREDO ALCALA
Letters: Alfredo Alcala Colors Bruce Jones

SHARON BANNON SAT ON THE EDGE OF THE DOCK, WATCHING THE LAUGHING, SCREAMING FORMS OF THE CAMPERS FROLICKING ON THE SUN-DRENCHED SURFACE OF LAKE GRANADA. SHE HEAVED A SIGH OF WEARY BOREDOM AND PICKED UP HER SILVERY WHISTLE...

FOUR SUMMERS NOW SHE HAD SERVED A CAMP GRANADA'S CHIEF COUNSELOR. FOUR SUMMERS NOW SHE HAD WASTED HER TIME ON YOUNG GIRLS WHEN SHE COULD HAVE BEEN IN THE CITY FINDING A PROSPECTIVE HUSBAND...

ALL RIGHT, GIRLS! LUNCH TIME!

SHE WAS TWENTY-NINE YEARS OLD AND SHE WASN'T GETTING ANY YOUNGER. MORE AND MORE SHE FOUND HERSELF GAZING IN ENVY AT THE SLIM FIGURES AND TANNED BODIES RUNNING PAST HER ON THE DOCK... BODIES THAT WOULD, IN THREE MONTHS, FIND THEMSELVES IN CROWDED CLASS-ROOMS WITH BOYS.

BUT JOBS WERE SCARCE THESE DAYS... AS SCARCE AS MEN IN HER LIFE...

'LO, MISS BANNON...

OH, HELLO... CHOKE WILLIE...

I...UH GOT THE EVEN'N' OFF TONIGHT, MISS BANNON. I WAS... UH, WONDERIN IF YOU'D LIKE TO TAKE A LITTLE DRIVE MEBE...

N-NOT TONIGHT, WILLIE... GAG... I HAVE TO DO SOME PAPER WORK...

SHE STRODE INTO THE MESS HALL BEHIND THE GIRLS AND TURNED AS MISS WATKINS THE OWNER, WADDLED UP...

HAVE A NICE MORNING SWIM, SHARON? ALL THE GIRLS ACCOUNTED FOR?

ALL ACCOUNTED FOR, MISS WATKINS.

THE NEW ADMINISTRATOR IS DUE TOMORROW, SHARON. WE WANT TO LOOK OUR BEST, YOU KNOW!

YES, MISS WATKINS...

CAMP GRANADA

AND THAT NIGHT, AS ON ALL NIGHTS, THE LONELINESS AND SOLITUDE PRESSED IN AROUND HER WITH THE HOT, SULTRY SUMMER BREEZES...

...WHEN... SOB... WILL SOMEONE TAKE ME AWAY FROM THIS?... SOMEONE HANDSOME AND STRONG AND RICH...

AND THEN, THE NEXT BRIGHT MORNING...

OH, SHARON! PLEASE COME HERE A MOMENT. I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET SOMEONE!

THIS IS MISTER LOWRY, SHARON, OUR NEW ADMINISTRATOR. HE'S GOING TO BE WITH US THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER! I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT SHOW HIM AROUND!

HELLO, SHARON!

HELLO...

SHARON FELT HER HEART LEAP TO HER THROAT. SHE STAMMERED LIKE A SCHOOL GIRL. MR. LOWRY WAS TOO BEAUTIFUL TO BE BELIEVED.

...AND CAMP GRANADA'S PROPERTY EXTENDS ALL THE WAY TO THE RIDGE.

IT CERTAINLY IS A LOVELY VIEW, SHARON...

...VERY LOVELY INDEED!

SHE WAS SO EXCITED SHE COULD HARDLY CONTAIN HERSELF. ALL HER LIFE SHE HAD DREAMED OF A MAN LIKE THIS. YET AS THE DAYS PASSED, LOWRY'S INITIAL WARMTH SEEMED TO DISSIPITATE...

WHEN IS HE GOING TO ASK ME OUT... *WHEN?*

CAMP GRANADA

EVENING, MR. LOWRY... LOVELY NIGHT...

GOOD EVENING, SHARON... YES, VERY!

FRUSTRATION PILED ON FRUSTRATION, YET LOWRY REFUSED TO NIBBLE. SHARON WAS FINALLY OBLIGED TO TRY THE OLD JEALOUSY ROUTINE...

I... UH, GOT THE NIGHT OFF, MISS BANNON, IF YER FREE...

WHY, THANK YOU, WILLIE, I'D ADORE A MOONLIT CANOE RIDE...

IT WAS A HIGH PRICE TO PAY. SHE HAD BEEN W TH WILLIE ONCE BEFORE... AND ONCE HAD BEEN ENOUGH...

PLEASE, MISS BANNON... I'D DO *ANYTHING* FOR YOU! JEST ONE LIL' KISS?...

...CHOKE... WILLIE, DON'T YOU EVER..., GAG... TAKE A BATH? THE SMELL...

FINALLY, THOUGH, IT PAID OFF...

I HAVE SOME TIME OFF TONIGHT, SHARON, I THOUGHT PERHAPS IF YOU WERE--

YES! I'D LOVE TO!

AND THINGS HAD GONE JUST AS SHE'D HOPED...

SHARON...

OH, JEFF... I WAS BEGINNING TO TH.NK YOU'D NEVER ASK!

...EXACTLY AS SHE'D HOPED...

...YES!... OH, JEFF, *YES!*... *LOVE* ME, DARLING... *LOVE ME!*

IT WOULD ONLY BE A QUESTION OF TIME NOW, SHE FELT SURE, BEFORE HE POPPED THE QUESTION...

MISS BANNON? I GET OFF WORK EARLY TON.GHT! I THOUGHT IF MEBE YOU WERE FREE...

I... I'M... GAG... SORRY, WILLIE... I M GO'NG TO BE TIED UP FOR QU.TE SOME-TIME NOW... *CHOKE!*

PLEASE, M SS BANNON. I KNOW I'M NOT HANDSOME LIKE HIM! BUT I *LOVE* YOU! I'D GIVE ANYTHING I OWN JUS' TO TOUCH YOU... TO K.SS YOU...

WILLIE, *STOP* IT!... GAG... DON T TALK LIKE THAT! LORD... *CHOKE*, THE *SMELL!*

THEN CAME THE AWFUL DAY IN MID-SUMMER... THE WORST DAY OF HER LIFE...

TEE-HEE!... GIGGLE..

WHAT'S THIS? ONE OF THE KIDS SNEAKED OVER FROM THE BOY'S CAMP?

JEFF!

SHARON!!

MISS BANNON!

HOW COULD YOU! OH GOD, HOW COULD YOU!

SHARON, WAIT!

SHE RAN... BLINDLY, HYSTERICALLY. IN ANY DIRECTION, TRYING TO TEAR THE SICKENING SIGHT FROM HER EYES, TRYING TO WASH IT FROM HER MIND FOREVER. SHE FOUND HERSELF SOMEHOW ON THE PORCH TO WILLIE'S CABIN...

HOW... SOB... HOW COULD HE?... SOB-SOB...

MISS BANNON? WHAT IS IT? WHA'D HE DO TO YOU?

WILLIE HAD TAKEN HER INSIDE... GIVEN HER A GLASS OF COLD LEMONADE... COMFORTED HER... POOR DISHEVELED, FOUL-SMELLING WILLIE, WHO HAD IDOLIZED HER FROM THE START...

I'D NEVER BREAK YOUR HEART, MISS BANNON! I LOVE YOU! MARRY ME! I'LL GIVE ALL I HAVE!

... SOB... YES.. SOB, WILLIE... I'LL MARRY YOU...

BEFORE SHE KNEW IT, SHARON HAD AGREED TO WILLIE'S OFFER! THERE WAS A LITTLE COUNTRY CHURCH JUST DOWN THE ROAD FROM THE CAMP...

--I NOW ANNOUNCE YOU MAN AND WIFE. YOU MAY... CHOKE... KISS THE BRIDE--

THE WEDDING NIGHT WAS SOMETHING LESS THAN SUCCESFUL...

HONEY, PLEASE! I WANT TO HOLD YOU! I NEED TO! I WANT YOU SO BAD!!

... CHOKE... I... GASP.. CAN'T! THE SMELL!... CHOKE!...

AND BEFORE THE EVENING WAS OUT, SHE WAS BACK IN FAMILIAR ARMS... STRONG ARMS... AND SHE WAS FORGIVING... AND BEGGING FORGIVENESS IN RETURN...

YOU MARRIED THE CREEP?

OH, JEFF, IT WAS HORRIBLE.' HIS TOUCH.' H'S... GASP ...SMELL!

WAIT A SECOND.' DO YOU REALIZE THAT YOU JUST MARRIED YOURSELF A VERY RICH MAN?

WILLIE RICH? DON'T BE RIDICULOUS.'

DIDN'T YOU KNOW THAT THIS CAMP WAS BUILT ON WILLIE'S LAND? MISS WATKINS PAID HIM QUITE A TIDY SUM FOR IT. AS I RECALL. NOW IF SOMETHING SHOULD HAPPEN TO POOR OLD WILLIE... AN ACCIDENT MAYBE...

JEFF. WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

WE COULD BE RICH, BABY.' WE COULD BE ON EASY STREET.' YOU'D INHERIT EVERYTHING.' BUT YOU'VE GOT TO DO IT, SHARON.' YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE AN ACCIDENT!

Y-YES, JEFF... ANYTHING YOU SAY...

SO SHARON RETURN TO WILLIE... BEGGED FOR FORGIVENESS YET AGAIN THAT NIGHT... AND SUGGESTED A NICE MOONLIT CANOE RIDE... THE KIND WILLIE ALWAYS LIKED...

.. SO MISS WATKING LET ME STAY ON AFTER I SOLD HER THE LAND. ON ACCOUNTA I HAD NOWHERE TO GO... 'SIDES, IT'S SO PRETTY HERE...

LOOK, WILLIE.' LOOK DOWN HERE.' A BIG FISH.'

WHERE? I DON T SEE NO F!--

...UH.!... FORGIVE ME, WILLIE...

WILLIE TUMBLED OVER THE SIDE... BUT NOT UNCONSCIOUS, AS SHARON HAD PLANNED. WILLIE COULDN T SWIM. SHARON WATCH 'N HORROR AS HE CLAWED THE NIGHT AIR... AS HIS EYES BULGED... AS THE LAKE WATER POURED INTO HIS LUNGS.

...GLK.!... SH-SHARON.' ...GLUG.!...

...WILLIE... (SHUDDER)...

SHE ROWED AWAY FROM THE FLAILING BODY, WALKED BACK TO WILLIE'S CABIN, AND PHONED LOWRY...

...OH, JEFF, IT WAS AWFUL.'

OKAY BABY, NOW ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS WAIT FOR THE BODY TO RISE.' THEN YOU CAN CLAIM YOUR INHERITANCE AND WE CAN BE MARRIED.' YOU DID GREAT, SWEETHEART.'

WEEKS PASSED... TERRIBLE, LONELY WEEKS WHEN SHARON NEEDED TO BE HELD AND COMFORTED... BUT STILL WILLIE'S BODY DIDN'T RISE... THEN, AT LAST, CAMP ENDED...

GOODBYE, MISS BANNON! SEE YOU NEXT YEAR!

HAVE A GOOD WINTER, MR. LOWRY!

PACIFIC

BUT IF SHARON COULDN'T PLAY THE GRIEVING WIDOW, THEN SHE COULD CERTAINLY PLAY - THE DEMANDING WIFE...

I'M SORRY BUT I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANY MONEY--

BUT SHE'S HIS WIFE! IT SAYS SO RIGHT HERE ON THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE!

OH, YES, SIR, I CAN SEE THAT! BUT WILLIE CAMPBELL WITHREW ALL HIS MONEY FROM THIS BANK SEVERAL WEEKS AGO!

IT WAS NIGHT WHEN THEY REACHED THE EMPTY CAMP-GROUNDS...

NOT SO FAST, JEFF!

HE *MUST* HAVE STASHED IT IN THAT CABIN! WHERE ELSE COULD IT BE?

THE THING LUMBERED INTO THE NARROW ROAD. LOWRY'S HEADLIGHTS REFLECTING OFF THE SLIME-ENGORGED WORMS CRAWLING OVER ITS DECAYED FLESH...

YAGGHH!!

LOWRY SENT THE CAR CRASHING INTO A TREE. SHARON SCREAMED AS THE ROTTING HULK TEETERED TOWARD THE SMOKING RUBBLE AND PULLED HER LOVER FROM BEHIND THE WHEEL...

IT'S WILLIE! YAGHH! HELP ME!

SHARON STOOD TRANSFIXED IN HORROR AS THE THING PULLED THE SHRIEKING LOWRY DOWN THE BANK TOWARD THE WAITING LAKE...

SHARON! HELP ME!

SHE WATCHED AS THE GIGGLING OBSCENITY DRAGGED HIM INTO THE TEPID WATER... WATCHED AS LOWRY'S EYES BULGED... AS HIS LUNGS FILLED...

SHARO— GLUP!...

SHE SPUN ABOUT AT LAST AND RAN... RAN ACROSS THE DESERTED CAMPGROUNDS... RAN TO THE NEAREST CABIN SHE COULD FIND...

...GASP... WILLIE'S CABIN!

THE DOOR WAS ALREADY OPEN. A FETID, RANCID SMELL OF DECAY PERMEATED THE CABIN'S INTERIOR...

THE... CHOKE.. THE BED.' THE SHEETS ARE TURNED DOWN.'

SHARON SAT DOWN HEAVILY ON WILLIE'S LUMPY MATTRESS... HER EYES WERE WIDE AND GLAZED...

...WAITING FOR ME... HEH-HEH... WAITING FOR ME TO RETURN...

SHE SAT QUIETLY STARING INTO SPACE ...THERE WAS A MOVEMENT OUTSIDE. THE DOOR...

...HEH-HEH... WA TING FOR WHAT HE ALWAYS WANTED...

SHARON LAY BACK ON THE BED... AN EVEN STRONGER STENCH OF PUTRESCENT FLESH WAFTED INTO THE ROOM...

...HEH-HEH... SHOULD HAVE LET HIM HAVE ME... HEH-HEH--

--WHEN HE DIDN'T SMELL SO BAD.' HEH-HEH...

ALL IS SUDDENLY STILL IN THE TINY CABIN... THEN A RUSTY SQUEAKING SOUND... FOLLOWED BY A FINAL AGONIZING SCREAM...

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

...THEN SILENCE ONCE AGAIN... FOREVER...

END.

A WALK IN THE WOODS

IT WAS ALICE WHO SUGGESTED THE VACATION IN GERMANY. AFTER ALL, DIDN'T THEY BOTH SPEAK THE LANGUAGE FLUENTLY? HADN'T THEY EARNED SOME TIME ARROAD? "GET AWAY FROM IT ALL," SHE O SAID. "SEE THE GERMAN COUNTRYSIDE!"

SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT GETTING LOST IN IT...

ARE YOU SURE IT WASN'T A LEFT TURN AT THE FORK, THEN A RIGHT TO THE LAKE?

I'M NOT SURE OF ANYTHING ANYMORE *BLAST IT!*

OH NO!

HSSSSS

OH YES! THAT'S IT FOR THE CAR. WE WALK!

IN THIS HEAT? JOHN WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING!

SURE WE DO WE'RE GOING BACK TO ST. LOUIS...

JUST AS SOON AS I CALL A SERVICE STATION FROM THAT HOUSE.

MY BRILLIANT HUSBAND.

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: BRET BLEVINS 17
Letters Bret Blevins Colors Bruce Jones

GEE, JUST LIKE THE OLD FAIRY TALES... LOOKS LIKE REAL GINGERBREAD, TOO...

WELL, DON'T *EAT* ANYTHING

THIS MIGHT JUST BELONG TO A REAL--

--WITCH.

HEE HEE! COME IN! COME IN, MY CHILDREN! LOST, ARE WE? ALL ALONE IN THE DARK 'OL WOODS! *HEE HEE!*

WE...ER HAD SOME CAR TROUBLE AND WERE WONDERING IF WE MIGHT USE YOUR--

YES, *YES!* *HEE HEE HEE!* BUT FIRST WE MUST GET YOU SOMETHING TO EAT! *HEE HEE!* FATTEN YOU UP, Y'KNOW! YES INDEED!

YOU SEE A PHONE ANYWHERE, 'HANSEL?

DON'T JOKE! THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE CREEE

AYAGGHH!

JOHN! DEAR GOD!

GET IT OFF! OH JESUS, GET IT OFF!

BOTHERSOME THING! THOUGHT I LEFT THAT CONTRAPTION OUTSIDE FOR THE VARMITS!

NOW JUST WHERE DID I PUT THE KEY? *HEE HEE!*

ALICE, HELP ME!

IT WON'T BUDGE!

HOLD YOUR LEG STILL!

B-BE CAREFUL...

HOW IS IT?

NOT TOO BAD... MY BOOT CAUGHT THE TEETH AND THAT OLD TRAP HAS LOST MOST OF IT'S SPRING!

BUT ALICE, LISTEN TO ME! WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!

SHE SET THAT TRAP ON PURPOSE!

WHAT?!

DON'T YOU SEE? THE GINGER BREAD HOUSE! THE WANDERING COUPLE! AND NOW THE TRAP! SHE REALLY *IS* A WITCH, HONEY! THIS REALLY *IS* A FAIRY TALE! I CAN *FEEL* IT!

COULDN'T FIND NO KEY *HEE HEE!* BUT HOW ABOUT SOME CHOCOLATE ECLAIRS AND CHERRY TARTS?

NO!

JOHN!

BUT DARLING, SHE WAS JUST A DOTTY OLD WOMAN--

SHE WAS A WITCH, DAMNIT, SHE WAS A *WITCH!* DIDN'T YOU SEE THE SIZE OF THAT *OVEN?*

A *MAN* COULD FIT IN THERE!

NOW WHAT...?

IF IT'S ANOTHER WITCH AT LEAST LET'S FIND HER *PHONE* THIS TIME.

ANYBODY HOME?

M-M! SOMETHING SMELLS GOOD!

ALICE... I DON'T LIKE THIS...

OH, JOHN, I'M STARVED! WE HAVEN'T EATEN SINCE THAT AWFUL MOTEL BREAKFAST!

DON'T TOUCH IT!

YOU'RE RIGHT-- TOO HOT...

AH, THIS ONE'S JUST RIGHT.

ALICE, PLEASE, WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! DON'T YOU SEE? THE THREE BOWLS OF PORRIDGE!

THE THREE CHAIRS! AND IN HERE...

THREE DIFFERENT SIZED BEDS! IT'S THE *FAIRY TALE*, ALICE!

JOHN, DON'T BE SILLY! IT'S JUST SIMPLE COINCI...

GROWFH!

EEEEEEEEEE

IF I HADN'T FOUND THIS SHOTGUN!

B-BUT IT'S ONLY *ONE* BEAR! IT *COULD* HAVE JUST BEEN WONDERING ABOUT...SMELLED THE FOOD...

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

OH! IT'S GOTTEN CHILLY OUT! EARLY FALL!...

HERE, WEAR THIS! IT WAS HANGING BY THE DOOR. NOW C'MON!

WH--WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT?

THAT CLOAK! THAT RED HOOD! JUST LIKE...

OH, COME ON, JOHN! JUST BECAUSE I PUT ON A RED HOODED CLOAK, YOU THINK THAT MAKES ME LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD? GOD! YOU'RE TOO MUCH!

AND I SUPPOSE THIS IS GRANDMA'S HOUSE? *REALLY!* I'VE HAD ABOUT *ENOUGH* OF THIS!

ALICE, DON'T GO NEAR IT, PLEASE! WAIT! *HONEY!*

DON'T HAVE A PHONE, DEARIE. BUT THE NEXT HOUSE DOES... 'BOUT THREE MILES DOWN THE ROAD...

YOU GO, JOHN, I'M JUST BUSHED. THESE SHOES...

Y-YOU MEAN... L-LEAVE YOU?...

I CAN HANDLE A SICK OLD WOMAN! NOW HURRY UP, IT'S GETTING DARK!

OKAY, THEN... I'LL LEAVE YOU THE GUN...

...OKAY, I ADMIT THAT EVERY LEGEND HAS A BASIS IN FACT...

BUT THESE ARE *FAIRY TALES* WE'RE TALKING ABOUT!

IN *YOUR* COUNTRY, ALICE. IN MINE THEY WERE LEGENDS!

YOU MEAN LIKE THE VAMPIRE LEGENDS... THE WEREWOLF LEGENDS? DO *YOU* BELIEVE THEM? DO YOU BELIEVE A PERSON CAN TURN INTO A WOLF?

I HAVE AN OPEN MIND.

BAH! NONSENSE! IT WAS JUST A WITHERED OLD WOMAN IN A ROCOCCO COTTAGE.

AND THE BEAR WAS JUST SOME POOR ANIMAL LURED DOWN THE MOUNTAIN TO A HUNTER'S CABIN BY THE SMELL OF FOOD...

WHAT ABOUT THE THREE DIFFERENT SIZED CHAIRS...? THE BEDS...?

LOOK, AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, LEGENDS BELONG IN THE SAME CLASS AS NURSERY RHYMES!

OH LOOK! A *FULL MOON!* IT'S *BEAUTIFUL!* LOOK!

HAND ME MY GLASSES, WILL YOU, ALICE?

OH, I'M SORRY-- DO YOU WEAR GLASSES?

THE BETTER TO SEE YOU WITH MY DEAR...

YOU LEFT THE GUN BY THE DOOR, ALICE. BUT NEVER MIND...

THE BULLETS PROBABLY WEREN'T SILVER, ANYWAY...

HEY! HEY THERE! I NEED TO USE YOUR PHONE!

SORRY, MISTER, PHONE'S OUT OF ORDER.

BUT MY WIFE *PANT*! MY CAR'S STALLED DOWN THE ROAD-*PANT*!.. I NEED TO CALL THE NEAREST TOWN.

TELL YOU WHAT, MISTER, YOU HELP ME FETCH A PAIL OF WATER FROM THAT WELL FOR DINNER, AND I'LL DRIVE YOU INTO TOWN!

IT'S A DEAL!

HERE, LET ME TAKE THAT BUCKET!

BY THE WAY, I'M JOHN BENSON. MY FRIENDS CALL ME JACK!

PLEASED TO KNOW YOU, JACK. I'M JILL HEINRICH!

INCIDENTALLY, WATCH YOUR STEP ON THIS HILL... LOOSE ROCKS...

...PERSON COULD BREAK HIS HEAD OPEN...

ALL HALLOWS

BILLY BRADSHAW CAME PUFFING DOWN CIMMARON STREET IN HIS OLD DEVIL COSTUME, GRIPING AND COMPLAINING ALL THE WAY. IT WAS STILL PRETTY EARLY AND THE OTHER KIDS HADN'T HIT THE STREETS YET. BINKY REALLY DID LOOK PRETTY RIDICULOUS IN THAT COSTUME-- I HAD TO BITE MY TONGUE TO KEEP FROM LAUGHING. BUT HE HAD ALWAYS LOOKED RIDICULOUS IN IT SO THAT WAS NOTHIN' NEW. NO NEWER THAN HIS GRIPIN'..

YOU LOOK LIKE A TOMATO WITH LEGS, BRADSHAW..

THIS IS DUMB, JACK. THIS IS SUPER-DUMB. THIS IS ULTRA-INCREDIBLY DUMB.

SO'S GOING TO SCHOOL, BUT WE STILL DO THAT EVERY YEAR.

I'M TOO OLD FOR THIS. I LOOK LIKE A FOOL IN THIS COSTUME: ALL THE GIRLS WILL NOTICE. MY REPUTATION WILL BE RUINED.

WHAT REPUTATION?

WE'RE GOING TO BE SENIORS NEXT YEAR, JACK! SENIORS! WHAT WILL PEOPLE THINK?

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: TIM CONRAD
Letters: Carrie McCarthy Colors: Steve Oliff

THERE'S REBSTEIN. HEY, BOBBY! OVER HERE!

CRIPES! SAME OL' DUMB SKELETON SUIT!

I JUST BEEN PEEKIN' IN MARY SUE CRAWFORD'S BEDROOM WINDOW! MAN, HAS SHE GOT A PAIR!

HI YA CHUBBY...

DON'T CALL ME THAT REBSTEIN, I *HATE* THAT!

I THOUGHT WE WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO START TILL WE WAS ALL TOGETHER ON THE ROUTE. AIN'T THAT THE RULES?

HEY BRADSHAW, YOU LOOK LIKE A WALKING PIMPLE.

PICKED UP ANY LOOT YET?

TELL HIM TO CUT IT OUT, JACK!

I'M REALLY GETTING SICK OF THIS ROUTINE FELLAS, I'M TOO *OLD* FOR THIS. I LOOK LIKE A *FOOL* IN THIS COSTUME!

YOU LOOK LIKE A FOOL WITHOUT IT.

SO WHERE'S SKEETER? LET'S GET THIS SHOW ON THE ROAD!

SKEETER'S WAITIN AT THE GATE, AS USUAL I GUESS

CRIPES! SAME OL SKEETER, SAME OL GATE SAME OL DUMB HALLOWE'EN EVERY YEAR! WE GOTTA GO GET THE LITTLE TWERP AND HE'S CLEAR ACROSS TOWN!

HEY LOOK! OL' LADY THOMPSON'S PLACE. SHE'S ALWAYS GOOD FOR A MILKY WAY. LET'S HIT HER!

SHE ISN'T ON THE ROUTE, BINKY...

SCREW THE ROUTE. I'M HUNGRY.

WAIT A SECOND, BRADSHAW! YOU'LL GIVE THE OLD MAID A CARDIAC!

OH! OH MY GOD! W-WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME?

JUST A CANDY BAR MISS THOMPSON-- Y KNOW TRICK-OR-TREAT 'N ALL

GO AWAY! I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTH NG.

BUT I ONLY WAN--

LEAVE ME ALONE, I TELL YOU I'M NNOCENT IT'S NONE OF MY AFFA R

CRAZY OLD BROAD! I ONLY WANTED SOME CANDY

WHAT DID YA EXPECT, YA JERK? IT'S NOT ON THE ROUTE.' YA PROBABLY SCARED HER HALF TO DEATH.

THERE'S SKEETER! RIGHT BY THE GATE, AS USUAL!

CRIPES. SAME OL DUMB STREET. I'M REALLY S CK OF THIS YOU GUYS

OKAY WE RE ALL TOGETHER LET'S GET SOME GRUB.

WHERE DO WE START?

DON T YOU KNOW BY NOW, BRADSHAW?

...THE KTNER'S PLACE!

I CAN TASTE THEM DONUTS NOW!

CRIPES. THIS IS DUMB

BUNG BUNG

TRICK OR TREAT!

OH MY GOODNESS

H-HERE YOU ARE, B-BOYS.. LOTS OF N-NICE DONUTS! T-TAKE ALL YOU W-WANT!!

M-M, BOY!

LEAVE SOME FOR US, HUH, CHUBBY?

WHO'S (MUNCH) NEXT ON THE LIST?

THE BOATNER PLACE...

TRICK OR TREAT!

DEAR GOD!

KINDA SLIM PICKIN'S THIS YEAR, AIN'T IT, MR BOATNER?

I-I HAVE SOME.. SOME CAKE IN THE KITCHEN B-BOYS! W-WOULD YOU PREFER THAT?

NAH (MUNCH-MUNCH) WE AIN'T GOT TIME. C'MON FELLAS!

TRICK OR TREAT MRS. COLLINS!

(GASP!)

YOU SERVE THE SAME OL' JUNK EVERY YEAR, MRS. COLLINS! I'M TIRED OF IT!

I--WELL, I...I COULD MAKE YOU A SANDWICH OR--PLEASE, T-TAKE WHATEVER YOU W-WANT...

HOW 'BOUT A HAMBURGER?

AW, LEAVE HER ALONE, BRADSHAW.

...MONSTERS!...

MONSTERS YOU THINK YOU CAN TERRORIZE THE WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD, DO YOU? YOU THINK YOU CAN DO THIS TO US EVERY YEAR? EH?

RALPH NO!

HE WAS OUR ONLY SON! OUR ONLY BOY! (SOB-SOB) I WON'T LET YOU HURT THE OTHERS. I WON'T LET YOU

C'MON! LETS GET OUTTA HERE!

FIRST THE SMITH'S, THEN THE MILLER'S! THEN THE KITNER'S. THEN THE BOATNER'S! LAST YEAR IT WAS ME WHO'S NEXT? HUH? WHEN WILL YOU STOP THIS?

WHEN WE'RE THROUGH, MR COLLINS!

TRICK OR TREAT, MRS. HATHAWAY!

SWEET JESUS NO!

EDDIE HOME MRS HATHAWAY?

NO. NO! HE-HE'S GONE TO VISIT H S GRANDPARENTS. HE'S GONE! BUT WE'VE GOT LOTS S OF NICE CANDY, BOYS.

WE DON'T WANT CANDY, MRS HATHAWAY...

PLEASE JUST ONE MORE YEAR. LET US HAVE HIM JUST ONE MORE YEAR!!

YOU GOT ANOTHER SON MRS HATHAWAY YOU'RE LUCKY.

WHERE S EDDIE MRS HATHAWAY?

HERE HE IS BOYS... TAKE HIM...

...AND BE GONE...

NO! PAUL, DON'T LET THEM HAVE HIM! OH GOD.

IT'S NO GOOD MARTHA... THEY LL JUST KEEP COMING BACK.. THEY LL FOLLOW US EVERYWHERE... YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE OTHERS RESISTED..

IT WAS THE OTHERS THAT DONE IT! I-I WAS ONLY TAGGIN ALONG!

DON T MAKE NO DIFFERENCE, EDDIE! YOU WAS PART OF IT.

T WAS SEVEN YEARS AGO! WE WAS JUST K DS. WE DION T MEAN NUTH N IT WAS JUST SOME TRASH ON THE R DOORSTEP JUST A HALLOWE EN TRICK. HE WAS THE *NEW* K D IN TOWN!

NOT FOR LONG HE WASN T, EDD E...

I'M THE LAST, A.N'T I? I'M THE LAST OF THE SIX THAT DONE IT..

YOU'RE THE LAST, EDDIE... HOLD STILL NOW ..

I'M SORRY, SKEETER. I DIDN'T *MEAN* IT! IT WAS A JOKE, A *JOKE*! IT WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BURN DOWN THE WHOLE HOUSE!

YAGGHH!

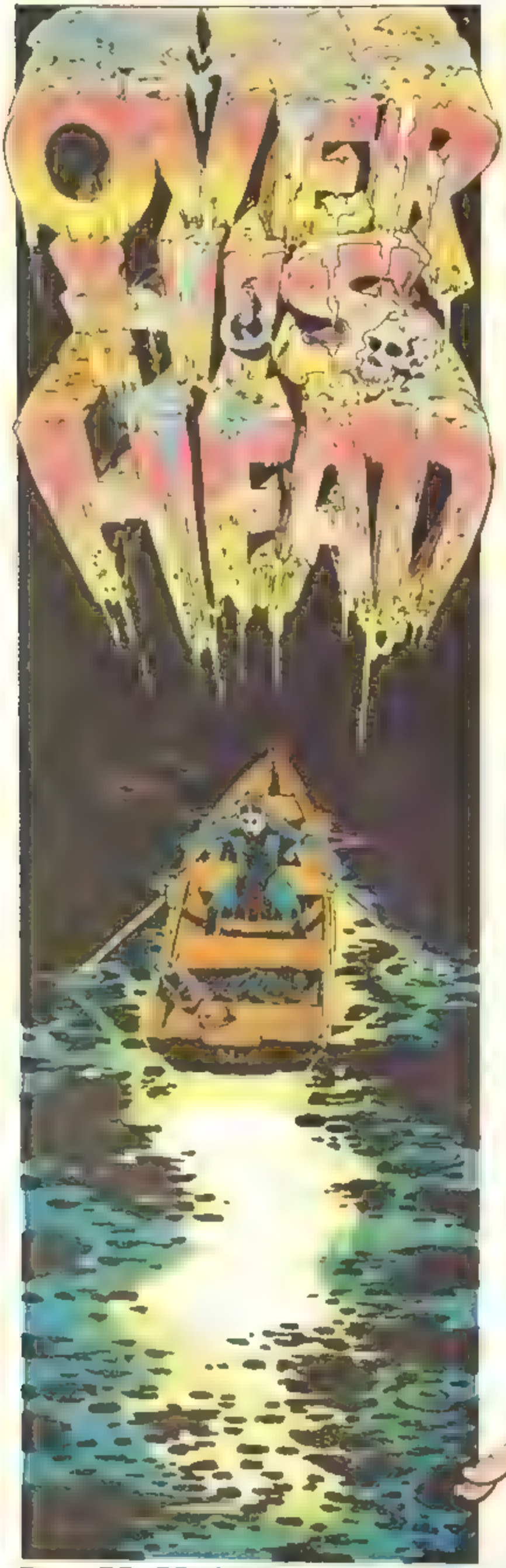
...JUST A (SOB) JOKE... ...JUST A (SOB) HALLOWE'EN (SOB) JOKE...

IS THAT IT? CAN I THROW AWAY THIS DUMB COSTUME NOW?

YOU GOIN' HOME, JACK?

NAH I'M GONNA WALK SKEETER BACK TO THE GATE FIRST.

S'LONG SKEETER.. GET SOME REST NOW Y'HEAR? YOU GET SOME REST..



WEIGHT HER DOWN SO SHE'LL STAY DOWN! DOWN THERE AT THE BOTTOM WITH ALL THE LITTLE FISHIES! YEP!
WHERE ARE YA, LILA HONEY? WHERE'D YA GO? JOE'S A'COMIN' FOR YA! IT'S ME, HONEY! I'M A'COMIN' DOWN TO SEE YA! ARE YA DOWN HERE, LILA? ARE YA WAITIN' FOR ME, HONEY? ARE YA?
1

Story: BRUCE JONES Art: MIKE PLOOG
Colors STEVE OLIFF

ONE MONTH EARLIER...

ROOM FOR RENT

--LOTTA *NUTS* IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD SO'S I GOTTA BE *CAREFUL* WHO I RENTS TO, KNOW WHAT I MEAN? CAN'T NEVER TELL THESE DAYS, PEOPLE SHAKE YOUR HAND ONE MINUTE CUT OUT YOUR *GIZZARD* THE NEXT, KNOW WHAT I MEAN? I'M ALL ALONE NOW THAT MR. SANCHEZ DIED SOTTA BE CAREFU... YOU AIN'T A *HOMO* ARE YA?

NO, I--

NOT THAT I GOT NOTHIN' *AGAINST* FAGGOTS YOU UNDERSTAND. MY OWN SISTER'S KID IS A LITTLE *LIGHT* ON HIS FEET IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN BUT I ALWAYS SAY: WHAT A PERSON DOES IN THE PRIVACY OF HIS OWN ROOM IS *HIS* BUSINESS. YOU AIN'T WITH *AA* ARE YA?

NO, I--

MY YOUNGEST *NEPHEW* WAS A DRINKER WRAPPED HIS BRAND NEW PORCHE AROUND A TELEPHONE POLE AT SIXTH AND MAPLE, HAD TO *PRY* HIM OFF THE WINDSHIELD AND *POUR* HIM INTO A *BAG*. I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT THEY KEPT THE CASKET CLOSED ON *THAT* FUNERAL, KNOW WHAT I MEAN? YOU AIN'T INTO *DRUGS* I HOPE?

NO, I--

GOTTA TENANT IN 4B THAT'S SHOOTING IT INTO HIS *ARMPIT*--COVERS UP THE *TRACKS*, KNOW WHAT I MEAN? OH, HE DON'T ADMIT IT, AND I CAN'T PROVE NOTHIN' BUT HE'S A *HOPHEAD* ALL RIGHT, I KIN *SMELL* IT ON HIS BREATH.

THAT'S *TWENTY-FIVE* IN *ADVANCE*, BY THE WAY.

YOU WANT THAT *TANK*? LAST TENANT LEFT IT. *COST* ME TO HAVE IT HAULED OFF--I'LL KNOCK *THREE BUCKS* OFF YER RENT IF YOU'LL KEEP IT.

YEAH... SURE... I ALLUS *WANTED* A FISH TANK...

DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'D WANT THE *TREE* TOO?...WON'T DO YOU MUCH GOOD IN JULY I GUESS. OR ARE YOU *JEWISH*?

NO, I...

NOT THAT I GOT ANYTHING *AGAINST* JEWS. MY BROTHER'S *DAUGHTER* MARRIED ONE. NICE CLEAN-CUT YOUNG MAN. SMART TOO. SO *WHAT* IF HE HAD A NOSE JOB? SO WHO *CARES*? NOT THAT HE'D *ADMIT* IT...

WHACK!

SPLAT

RENT S DUE THE FIRST OF EACH MONTH. *NO* EXCUSES. YOU DONT PAY UP YOU FIND YER DOOR *LOCKED*. I KEEP YER STUFF TILL YOU PAY. I DONT LIKE TO BE A HARD ASS, BUT A WOMAN ALL ALONE LIKE ME HAS GOT TO BE CAREFUL KNOW WHAT I MEAN? YOU LOOK KINDA PUNY, YOU GOTTA COLD?

NO, I...

NO RADIOS OR TV AFTER 0 P.M. TRASH DAY S TUESDAY ENJOY YOUR STAY.

IF YOU WUZ REAL I'D ASK YOU OUT ON A DATE. I AINT NEVER BEEN ON A DATE BEFORE...

...F YOU WUZ REAL...

--G.VE ME A BREAK, ROSIE AND SERVE THE *NEXT* BEER OVER AT *MY* PLACE. WHAD YA SAY?

I'D SAY YER *LITTLE* HEAD'S TALK N FOR YER *BIG* HEAD AGA.N, AL

LOOK, SHORTY, THIS AIN'T NO *CREDIT UNION!* YOU GET SOME BREAD AND I'LL GIVE YOU A DRINK *OTHERWISE--*

BUT I *GOT* THE BREAD THIS TIME, PETE! *SEE?* I *GOT* THE BREAD! SEE THE BREAD, PETE, *SEE* IT?

HE SEES IT, DOLL-FACE. WE *BOTH* SEE IT. YOU GONNA DRINK UP ALL THAT CASH, *YOURSELF?*

...UH ...MAKE THAT *TWO* BEERS PETE!

MAKE IT TWO *BOURBONS* INSTEAD, PETE. MY NAME'S LILA...

YOU, UH, YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO TELL ME *YOUR* NAME NOW...

HUH? OH, I'M *JOE BECKMAN.* UH... ARE YOU *REAL?*

HA-HA! AS REAL AS *ANYTHING* IN THIS PHONY BURG! HOW FAR AWAY IS YOUR PAD, SWEETS?

ROOMS

THIS IS YOUR --*PAD?*

YEAH NICE HUH?

TELL YOU WHAT, DOLL, WHY DON'T YOU HUSTLE ON DOWN TO THE ALL-NIGHT *THRIFT SHOP* AND BUY US A NEW *MATTRESS.* THEN HUSTLE BACK HERE AND LILA WILL MAKE THE *EARTH* MOVE FOR... YA. UH FOR FIFTY BUCKS, OF COURSE...

FIFTY? WELL, I...

SOON...

I (GASP) ONLY GOT *FORTY* BUCKS LEFT NOW, LILA (GRUNT), MEBBE YOU COULD JUST MAKE THE EARTH *TREMBLE* A LITTLE BIT...

I *TREMBLED* ALL RIGHT, LILA, I SURE DID *TREMBLE* ALL RIGHT! HOW BOUT *TOMORROW* NIGHT? MEBBE WE COULD MAKE IT TREMBLE SOME *MORE!*

SUGAR YOU GOT THE MONEY AND LILA'S GOT THE *TIME!*

AN *ADVANCE?* FER PUSHIN' A *BROOM?* ARE YOU *KIDDIN'?*

SEE, BERNIE, I GOT THIS *GIRL* NOW AN--

LOOK, KID, TELL YOU WHAT: I JUST LOST MY REGULAR *COOK.* YOU EVER SLUNG HASH BEFORE?

WEL... I--

TRY YOU OUT FOR *TONIGHT.* YOU DON'T MAKE NOBODY THROW UP, AND YOU GOT YER ADVANCE. DEAL?

SEE, LILA, I GOT THE *DOUGH!* I'M THE NEW COOK AT BERNIE'S PLACE AN--

YEAH, YEAH, SURE, ONLY IT'LL COST YA *DOUBLE* THIS TIME, JOE, AN' A NEW *BED.*

WILL YA MAKE THE *EARTH* TREMBLE AGAIN TONIGHT, LILA, HUH, WILL YA?

TOOTS. WE'LL SHAKE YER FRONT TEETH LOOSE!

YOU KNOW, THIS PLACE COULD USE SOME *CURTAINS,* JOE...

COITINS?

WEL... TO TELL THE TRUTH, THIS CHILI AIN'T *BAD...*

JUST A *LITTLE* ADVANCE, BERNIE, JUST A *LITTLE* ONE!

I *LOVE* YOU, LILA... I LOVE YOU MORE THAN MY PET HAMSTER *HARVEY* THAT *DIED* LAST WINTER AND STUCK TO THE BOTTOM OF THE CAGE. I LOVE YOU MORE THAN--

YEAH, *SURE,* JOE...YA KNOW, WE COULD USE SOME *FURNITURE* AROUND HERE...

IT'S SWELL, JOE. THIS *SLIP* IS GETTING KINDA FRAYED THROUGH... AND REMEMBER THAT *FUR COAT* WE SAW AT BULLOCK'S YESTERDAY?

YOU LIKE THE NEW *CHAIR,* LILA? IT DON'T TRY TO COP A *FEEL* LIKE THE OLD ONE, DOES IT?

WORLD FAMOUS MASTER CHEF JOSEPH AT BERNIE'S BAR

CHILI • KING •

I TOOK ON *EXTRA HOURS* LIKE YA ASKED, LILA, NOW COULD WE--

SURE HON, SOON AS YOU GET THAT *COLOR TV* I WANTED AND THAT NEW *SOFA* AND--

--STEREO, TOASTER, THAT BROOCH AT BERGDORF'S THE NAUTILUS COURSE--

LILA

HUH?

I WANT WE SHOULD GET MARRIED, LILA...

HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

HA-HA-HA-H-(U.P.)

LILA? IYM **SORRY**, HONEY! I DIDN'T **MEAN** IT! YA SHOULDNTA **LAUGHED** LIKE THAT! I DON'T **LIKE** IT WHEN PEOPLE LAUGH. **LILA?** YOU AIN'T GONNA BE **DEAD** NOW ARE YA, LILA, LIKE HARVEY? **LILA?**

MR BECKMAN? OPEN UP PLEASE IT'S MRS. SANCHEZ THE LANDLADY

ARE YOU IN THERE MR BECKMAN? OPEN UP PLEASE I HAVE AN OFFICER WITH ME.

MR. BECKMAN? YOU'VE BEEN IN THERE FOR WEEKS! MR BECKMAN!

GOT TO WEIGHT YOU, L..A..YER...

..GOT TO WEIGHT YOU DOWN SO'S THEY CAN'T FIND YOU...YOU DOWN HERE LILA?

...AH THERE YOU ARE.

...JUST GOTTA TIE THOSE WEIGHTS ROUND YA HONEY, GOTTA--

--HA R...HA R ALL OVER THE PLACE ..TOO MUCH HAIR'..ALL TANGLED...

...TANGLED UP! CAN'T GET AWAY I--LILA! HONEY DON'T ...C-CAN'T BREATHE!.. LILA...LILA!

BECKMAN! YOU IN THERE?

KA-RUNCH!

HOLY JUMPIN' JE-ZUZZ!

AND HE NEVER BROUGHT ANYONE UP HERE YOU SAY?

ONLY THEM LITTLE PIECES OF DOLL FURNITURE HE GOT DOWN AT THE THRIFT SHOP...I SEEN HIM!

CRIPES, I SHOULDA KNOWN BETTER--WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD'S FULL O NUTS...

YEAH TELL ME ABOUT IT.

LILA

PLOOF-82

NIGHTWATCH

LT. HACKER AWAKENS WITH A FLUTTERING OF EYES AND A STIFFNESS OF JOINTS. HE STRETCHES LANGUIDLY, SMOOTHING OUT THE CRINKLES, AND PUSHES UP ON ONE ELBOW. ABOVE HIM, THE FIRST STARS ARE TWINKLING FORTH IN THE WIDE DESERT SKY. HACKER CAN FEEL THE SAND AROUND HIM BEGINNING TO COOL FROM ITS DAILY BATTLE WITH THE SUN...

HE SITS UP, WINCING AT THE KITCH IN HIS BACK. IT SEEMS LIKE HE WAKES UP STIFFER EVERY NIGHT IN THE CRAMPED FOXHOLE. HOW LONG HAVE THEY BEEN HERE? HOW LONG HAD IT BEEN SINCE THE FIRST ALIEN BOMBS FELL AND CIVILIZATION CRINGED IN HORROR AND THE GREEN MISTS CLEARED, LEAVING MUTATIONS AND FREAKS AND INANIMATE OBJECTS ANIMATE? MONTHS. MAYBE YEARS. HACKER COULDN'T REMEMBER. IT SEEMED LIKE THEY'D BEEN HERE IN THE DESERT FOREVER...

BRUBAKER? YOU UP?

YEAH. IS IT SUNDOWN?

IT IS. LET'S MOVE THE CHILDREN.

MEYER. BECKMAN. SHARP ROTHSTEIN. LET'S GO

ARE WE OUTSIDE AGAIN?

WE ARE. MOVE IT.

OH, LORD, I WAS DREAMING THAT WE WERE INSIDE THE CASTLE ALL SNUG AND CURLED UP.

MOVE YER BUTT MEYER. YOU TOO, BECKMAN. WE'VE GOT A ROUGH TREK AHEAD.

Story: BRUCE JONES Art KEN STEACY
Colors KEN STEACY

SERGEANT BRUBAKER JOINS HACKER'S SIDE, STRETCHING AND YAWNING AGAINST THE NIGHT AIR ..

LOOK AT THEM, BRUBAKER. GREEN AS SAPLINGS. REMEMBER WHEN YOU WERE THAT YOUNG?

YOUTH.

YOU WANT MY OPINION, SIR? I DON'T THINK THEY MAKE 'EM LIKE THEY USED TO. LOOK AT THAT SKINNY SHARP KID. HE'D SNAP IN TWO IN A TIGHT SQUEEZE.

ALL RIGHT, DRESS IT UP! ROTHSTEIN, GET THE LEAD OUT! SOUND OFF!

METBAUM?

A SANDY-HAIRED RECRUIT HUSTLES FORWARD WITH GANGLY STRIDES AND CLANGING CANTEEN...

SIR?

WHERE THE HELL DID YOU COME FROM?

SENT IN YESTERDAY AFTERNOON, SIR, WHILE YOU WERE ASLEEP!

EVER SEEN COMBAT BEFORE, SOLDIER?

WITHOUT THE BULL!

WELL...

WELL, NOT EXACTLY, SIR.

ALL RIGHT. GET BACK IN LINE.

LORD, NEWER EVEN THAN SHARP! LOOK AT THAT UNIFORM, ALL PRESSED AND SHINY!

DON'T SWEAT IT, SERGEANT. IT'LL GET DIRTY SOON ENOUGH! ALL RIGHT, LET'S GO! WE GOT TWELVE HOURS TO MAKE THE CASTLE BEFORE WE TURN INTO RAT MEAT! MOVE OUT!

IT'S A LONG WALK--

--MADE EVEN LONGER BY THE SHIFTING, UNTRACTABLE SAND BENEATH THEIR BOOTS. UP ONE DUNE, DOWN THE NEXT. THE MEN COMPLAIN. THEY ALWAYS DO. POOR GANGLY, TENDERFOOT METBAUM CAN HARDLY KEEP UP...

BRUBAKER WATCHES HIM AND THE REST OF THEIR MOTLEY LITTLE ARMY...

LORD, CLIFF, DO YOU SUPPOSE IKE SENT UP THIS PATHETIC NOVICE?

WHO ELSE?

WHY SO NEW. WHY SO GREEN?

I SUPPOSE BECAUSE HE COULDN'T FIND ANY OLD ONES IT'S THE PLASTIC AGE, BEN.

KNOW WHAT I MISS THE MOST? THE OCEAN.!

YEAH? YOU LIKE THE PACIFIC THEATRE?

OH, MAN, YEAH.! WHY DON'T IKE EVER SEND US TO THE BEACH, CLIFF? THAT SALT AIR, THEM BREAKERS FLOPPIN IN! MAN

IT'S NEARLY SUMMER. HE USUALLY SENDS US THERE AROUND NOW. KEEP YOUR SHIRT ON.

I BEEN WEARING THE SAME ONE FOR SO LONG IT'S GLUED ON!

SIX HOURS LATER THE FIRST RAT HITS THEM..

YNAGGGGGHH.

IT'S A BIG GREY, WITH A TAIL A BLOCK LONG AND A SNOUTFUL OF SIX-INCH CANINES FLASHING WHITE IN THE MOONLIGHT. IT GETS ROTHSTEIN BEFORE HE KNOWS WHAT HIT HIM...

HIT T STAY LOW AND FIRE!

THEY PUMP EVERYTHING THEY'VE GOT INTO THE RAT, BUT SHE'S A BIG ONE, A REAL GARBAGE-EATER, AND BEFORE THEY CAN SCARE HER OFF ROTHSTEIN LOSES A LEG FROM THE KNEE DOWN...

HIS SCREAMS ARE TERRIBLE.

HACKER KNEELS BESIDE HIM...

EASY, SON...

I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE, SIR! I CAN'T *TAKE* IT! EVERY NIGHT THE SAME THING, TRUDGE FOR THE CASTLE, TRUDGE FOR THE CASTLE, TRUDGE FOR THE CASTLE! WHAT FOR? WHAT *FOR?*

DOES IT HURT BAD?

HURT? *HURT?* OF *COURSE* NOT! THERE'S NO PAIN! THERE'S *NEVER* ANY PAIN! PAIN WOULD BE *NORMAL!* PAIN WOULD MAKE *SENSE!* BUT THERE'S NONE, NOT EVEN ANY *BLOOD!* NOT IN *THIS* WAR! THIS TRAVESTY! AND TOMORROW WHEN I WAKE UP, I'LL HAVE A BRAND NEW LEG STUCK ON 'N PLACE OF THE ONE I LOST! OH, IT MAY NOT FIT EXACTLY, BUT IT'LL KEEP ME TRUDGING! TRUDGING, ALWAYS TRUDGING TO THE DAMN CASTLE! WHY? *WHY!*

IT'S THE ONLY PROTECTION WE HAVE AGAINST THE RATS, SON!

YEAH, YEAH...

IN MINUTES THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY ONCE MORE...

THE KID'S RIGHT, CLIFF. IT'S THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER. WHY DOESN'T IKE JUST LEAVE US IN THE CASTLE? AT LEAST AT NIGHT?

IKE DOES THE BEST HE CAN, BEN. HE'S GOT A LOT ON HIS MIND. MAYBE...MAYBE HE'S TESTING US...SEEING IF OLD SOLDIERS WEATHER AS WELL AS THE NEW...

SOMETIMES I THINK OLD IKE ACTS LIKE A TEN-YEAR-OLD KID!

AND THEY BOTH LAUGH OUT LOUD...

TWO MORE RATS HIT THEM BEFORE THEY CAN DASH SAFELY INSIDE THE CASTLE WALLS METBAUM IS BITTEN IN HALF..

THEY LET THE MONSTER DRAG AWAY HIS UPPER HALF NO AMOUNT OF MODERN HEALING CAN MEND A WOUND LIKE THAT

IT IS METBAUM'S RAVAGED BODY THAT ALLOWS THEM TO MAKE THE CASTLE--

--BARELY IN TIME..

IT IS SUNRISE HACKER AND BELBAKER LIE DOWN IN THE COOL SAND AND FEEL A DARK SLEEP STEALING OVER THEM..

EVER NOTICE HOW THEY ATTACK THE NEW BOYS FIRST CLIFF? THINK THEY LIKE THE TASTE OF THE NEW ONES BETTER?

BEATS ME GO TO SLEEP BEN.

CLIFF?

YEAH?

THE AIR INSIDE THE LITTLE CASTLE WARMS AS THE BRIGHT JUNE SUN BEATS DOWN UPON IT...

THINK IKE WILL COME TODAY?

I HOPE SO

BEN WINCES AT THE STIFFNESS IN HIS LIMBS.

SOMETIMES SOMETIMES I THINK HE FORGETS ALL ABOUT US OUT HERE

NO. HE'LL REMEMBER YOU'LL SEE

YOU THINK SO CLIFF?

SURE

I HOPE SO. I'D SURE LIKE TO SEE THE OCEAN AGAIN... THEM BIG WAVES... THAT SALT AIR... KNOW WHAT I MEAN, CLIFF?

BUT HACKER IS SILENT AND STILL...

A ROBIN FLIES ACROSS THE DESERT SKY. SILENT AND BROODING, THE CASTLE STANDS ALONE AGAINST THE STRETCH OF YELLOWED SANDS. THEN...

HACKER AND BRUBAKER AND THE REST ARE LIFTED CAREFULLY FROM THE SANDY FLOOR AND CARRIED REVERENTLY BACK TO THEIR FOXHOLES...

IT IS NOTED BY THE VAST BLUE EYES THAT ONE OF THE LITTLE SOLDIERS IS MISSING A LEG. IT WILL HAVE TO BE REPLACED...

THE PLASTIC ONES DON'T LAST AS LONG AS THE OLD TIN ONES. BUT THE OLD TIN ONES ARE HARD TO FIND THESE DAYS..

A WOMAN'S VOICE CALLS FROM ACROSS THE SANDBOX AND STRETCH OF GREEN, SUBURBAN LAWN..

IKE! GET YOUR SUIT ON, HONEY! AND BRING YOUR TOYS! WE'RE GOING TO THE BEACH!

ULLA-JEAN KINCAID SPRAWLED SEDUCTIVELY ON HER PARENTS LUMPY, THREAD-BARE SOFA, RAVEN HAIR FLOWING LIKE A DARK WATERFALL ABOUT HER SLIM, ALABASTER SHOULDERS. SHE STRETCHED ONE LONG, PERFECTLY-SHAPED LEG TOWARD THE WORN-AWAY LIVING ROOM CARPET AND FLICKED ABSENTLY AT A PIECE OF LOOSE THREADING WITH HER BARE FOOT. SHE SIGHED LOUDLY, STRETCHED, ARCHED HER SLIM BACK UNTIL THE THIN SCRAP OF MATERIAL THAT PASSED FOR A BLOUSE STRAINED PRECARIOUSLY AGAINST HER SWELLING ADOLESCENT BOSOM. ULLA-JEAN: THE MOST BEAUTIFUL, MOST DESIRABLE YOUNG WOMAN IN ALL OF HOLCUM COUNTY. ALL THE LOCAL BUCKS WERE YEARNING TO GET TO HER, AND NOW, AS HER PARENTS HAD JUST DISCOVERED, ONE OF THEM, AT LEAST, APPARENTLY HAD...

YOU'RE WHAT?!!

YOU'RE WHAT?!!

INFANT TERRIBLE

PREGNANT! PREGNANT! PREGNANT! JUDAS, ARE YA DEAF? I AIN'T EXACTLY THRILLED ABOUT IT MYSELF!

SLUT!

CRACK!

YELP!

Story: BRUCE JONES Art VAL MAYERICK
Colors: STEVE OLIFF

WHO WAS IT? JOE BOB HOLCUM? HANK WHITAKER? BIF LINSTROM?

YES, YES, AND YES! I DUNNO WHO THE LIL' BASTARD BELONGS TO! WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE? I'M STILL GONNA HAVE A BELLY IN A FEW MONTHS!

YEAH, I JUST RUINED MY CHANCES OF MARRIN' THAT SWISHY WIMP LEONARD PETRIE AND INHERITIN' HIS STINKIN' STEEL MILL! SO WHAT?

'DIOT LITTLE TRAMP! YOU KNOW WHAT YOU JUST DONE?

BUT ULLA, HONEY, THE WEDDING IS ALL PLANNED! IN SIX MONTHS YOU'RE TO WALK DOWN THE AISLE OF THE BALES BAPTIST CHURCH WITH THE RICHEST, MOST ELIGIBLE YOUNG MAN IN HOLCUM COUNTY!

IN SIX MONTHS I'LL LOOK LIKE THE GOODYEAR BLIMP!

YOU BRAINLESS LIL' CHIPPIE! YOU THINK YOU GONNA CHEAT ME OUTTA A EARLY RETIREMENT AND A TWENTY-ACRE RANCH JUS' CUZ YOU CAN'T SAY NO TO THE LOCAL WHITE TRASH?

I AIN'T NEVER SEEN THE INSIDE OF THAT CRUMMY CHURCH AND I DON'T NEVER MEAN TO-O-OWWWW!

PA!

EVENIN', MRS. KINCAID. IS ULLA-JEAN ABOUT?

LEONARD!

SO HOW'S THE STEEL BUSINESS THESE DAYS, LEONARD?

OH, THE LOCAL DO-GOODER ENVIORN-MENTALISTS ARE STILL ACCUSING US OF DUMPING WASTE MATERIAL INTO THE SWAMP, BUT OF COURSE THAT'S RIDICULOUS. AND EVEN IF WE WERE, WHO CARES ABOUT A BUNCH OF GATORS AND MARSH RATS?

I CERTAINLY HOPE THAT CUT HEALS BEFORE THE WEDDING, ULLA-JEAN. YOU SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL WITH THOSE LOOSE BOARDS..

YEAH...I SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL...

IS EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT? DOES HE STILL WANT TO MARRY YOU? IS THE WEDDING STILL ON?

YEAH, YEAH, IT'S ON-- KIN I GO TO BED NOW?

NOT A CHANCE!

WHERE WE GOIN', PA?

TO GOODY WATKINS SHACK, TO GET RID O' THAT KID.

BUT COULDN'T WE JUST GO TO DOC RAMSEY AND--YOU KNOW...

YOU THINK YOU CAN HIDE SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT IN A TOWN THIS SIZE? NO WAY, WOMAN! WE'RE GOIN' WHERE DECENT FOLK DON'T *NEVER* GO! WHERE A SECRET REMAINS A SECRET-- WHEN THE PRICE IS RIGHT!

PA, I'M SCARED!

GOOD! YOU'LL THINK TWICE MEBE NEXT TIME!

AYE, GOODY CAN DO IT... HEH-HEH!

GIVE 'ER THE MONEY, MA.

PA, I'M SCARED!

BUT WHY NOT LET HER STAY HERE, HAVE THE CHILD WITH *ME*! I'LL LOOK AFTER IT! I...I'D LIKE A CHILD! HEH-HEH!

WELL *I* WOULDN'T! NOW CAN YOU GET RID OF IT OR NOT? IT STINKS IN HERE!

THAT'S IT... DRINK IT ALL, CHILD...HEH-HEH!

...ULP...

...HEH-HEH!...

EEEGAGHHH!

PA!

IS...IS THAT IT?

AYE. YER DAUGHTER WILL THROW UP FOR A WEEK, THEN BE FINE..

GIMME THAT!

WHAT!

WAIT NOTH'N'! I AIN'T TAKIN' NO CHANCES WITH AN OLD WITCH LIKE YOU!

I... I FEEL SICK...

YOU'LL FEEL BETTER IN A FEW MONTHS WHEN YER SITTIN' IN THE BACK OF A NEW ROLLS INSTEAD OF THIS OL' RATTLETRAP.

LOOKA DAT! IT AIN'T GOT NO SCALES.

WHAD YA 'SPECT? WIFF ALL DA GUNK THAT MILL'S SPEWIN' INTO DA SWAMP, WE LUCKY *ANYTHIN'* COMIN' OUTTA HERE LOOKS NORMAL!

...GURGLE...BLURGLE ...POP!

...GURGLE... BLBBLE...

SO TODAY'S THE BIG WEDDIN' DAY FER YOU AND LEONARD, EH ULLA?

YEAH, 'CEPT I AIN'T GONNA *BE* THERE! I'M GONNA LOLL AROUND HERE IN THE MEADOW WITH YOU FELLAS A WHILE LONGER, THEN LIGHT OUT O' THIS HICK BURG *FOREVER.*

AIN'T NOBODY *NEVER* GONNA GET *ME* ON THE INSIDE OF A CHURCH!

HEY, LOOK AIN'T THAT THE OLD WITCH'S SHACK YONDER? LE'S HAVE US SOME FUN!

YAH-HOO!

ANYBODY HOME? YOU GOT ANY *LOVE* POTIONS, OLD LADY?

STINKS IN HERE!

WHAT'S SHE SQUAWKIN' ABOUT? CLAIM WHO?

YOU!

YOU COME FOR HIM! YOU COME TO CLAIM HIM BACK! BUT HE'S MINE, *MINE!* YOU LEFT HIM HERE! YOU CAN'T HAVE HIM!

YOU GOTTA GET OUTTA HERE! HE'S GROWED! GROWED *FAST!* INCREDIBLE *FAST!* AND *MEAN!* AN' HE DON'T LIKE STRANGERS! YOU GOTTA GET OUT, *FAST!*

THE OLD WITCH IS NUTS! WHADDYA SAY WE SET FIRE TO THE PLACE? HA-HA!

WHATCHA HIDIN' IN THE BACK ROOM, OLD HAG!

NO!

YAGGHHHHHH!

..3CHOKE!S... JOE BOB!

THUMP!

YAGGGHH!

OH, GOD, LOOK AT IT!

ULLA! HANK! HELP ME!

YAGGH!

ULLA!

ULLA, HELP ME!

YAGGHHHHH!

OH GOD, PLEASE DON'T LET IT GET ME! I'LL BE A GOOD GIRL, I PROMISE!

SHORE...WHERE'S THE *CHOKE!* SHORE?

A BUILDING! MAYBE THERE'S SOMEONE INSIDE!

MADE IT! *CHOKE!* *MADE IT!*

GASP!

ULLA? WHERE THE DICKENS YOU BEEN? IT'S NEARLY TIME FOR THE CEREMONY!

GET OUTTA THEM WET CLOTHES, GIRL, YER GOTTA BE DECENT FER YER WEDDIN'!

BAM BAM BAM

WHO'S THAT? LATECOMER?

ULLA, YOU BRING SOMEONE WITH YOU?

ULLA? S'MATTER WITH YOU, GIRL? DON'T JES' STAND THERE...LET HIM IN!

BAM BAM BAM BAM

HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

ULLA? *ULLA?...*

BAM BAM BAM

HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

SPEED DEMONS

ME? I'D BEEN DRIVIN' A HACK FOR MOST OF MY LIFE. DID I LIKE IT? WELL, I ALSO SHOVELED WET CEMENT WHEN I WAS A KID, AND SOLD ENCYCLOPEDIAS AND I SURE AS HELL LIKED IT BETTER THAN *THAT!*

A CABBY'S HIS OWN MAN, KNOW WHAT I MEAN? HE DOES HIS JOB WELL, HE EARNS A DECENT LIVIN'. HE DON'T, HE DON'T. SIMPLE AS THAT.

SOME DAYS IS BOTTLENECKS AND SKIMPY TIPPERS; SOME DAYS IS SMOOTH SATIN... LIKE ANYTHIN' ELSE IN LIFE.

AND SOME DAYS, LIKE LAST WEDNESDAY, IS *DIFFERENT* ALTOGETHER...

Rand Holmes

I SEEN THESE TWO KIDS ON THE CORNER OF TWELFTH AND DELANCEY. GIRL WAS SKINNY AND BLONDE AND WASTED-LOOKIN'. STONED PROBABLY LIKE ALL THESE KIDS NOWDAYS. THE GUY WAVES ME OVER...

Story BRUCE JONES Art RAND HOLMES
Colors STEVE OLIFF

I DON'T GENERALLY LIKE TAKIN' ON DOPEHEADS, BUT IT HAD BEEN A SLOW EVENIN' I PULLED TO THE CURB AND HOPED THEY WERE RICHER THAN THEY LOOKED.

CAB

THEY DIDN'T SAY A WORD UNTIL THEY'D SLID INTO THE BACK SEAT. THEN THE GUY LEANED TOWARD THE FRONT...

MY GIRL FRIEND LIKES IT *FAST*...

I PULLED DOWN THE RED LEVER AND EASED FROM THE CURB...

GET YOU THERE IN A JIFFY.

WHERE YOU HEADIN?

NO ANSWER. I GLANCED AT THE REARVIEW. THE BACK SEAT LOOKED *EMPTY*...

...CRIPES... ...ONE OF DESE...

I GOTTA HAVE A DESTINATION, BUDDY...

JUST DRIVE

DAMN KIDS...WHY CAN'T THEY GO NECK IN THE BACK OF A THEATER LIKE WE USED TO?

HONK

BLUDG

RENT-A-TRUCK

BEEP

WE AIN'T TEN SECONDS INTO TRAFFIC WHEN I STARTED HEARIN' THE *NOISES* IN THE BACK...

...M-M... ...YES...

CRIPES ...WHAT A LIFE!...

I HEADED DOWN McDOUGAL STREET, HOPIN' THIS WOULDN'T TAKE TOO LONG...

MY GIRLFRIEND WANTS YOU TO GO FASTER...

THERE'S A *SPEED LIMIT* BUDDY!

SOMETHIN' HIT THE SEAT BESIDE ME. I GLANCED OVER. THE BILL WAS WRINKLED AND FOLDED...

...BUT I RECOGNIZED ENOUGH OF FRANKLIN'S FACE TO MAKE ME EASE DOWN ON THE PEDAL...

THE LITTLE RED DASH NEEDLE NOSED UP...

...WHILE I NOSED THE HACK TOWARD STIFIC AVENUE WHERE THE TRAFFIC WAS LIGHTER...

THEN THE LITTLE-GIRL WHINE STARTED IN AGAIN...

...YES!...

...*FASTER!*...

MY GIRLFRIEND WANTS YOU TO GO FASTER.

LOOK BUDDY, I'M DOIN' OVER FORTY! THIS TOWN IS CRAWLIN' WITH CABBY-HATIN' COPS!

THUMP

I STEPPED HER UP TO FORTY-FIVE, CURSING SOFTLY UNDER MY BREATH...

WE WHIZZED PAST AN OLD MAN ON CRUTCHES AND CAUGHT THE FAST LANE NEXT TO THE RIVER...

OH YES!... FASTER!.. ...FASTER!...

MY GIRLFRIEND WANTS...

YEAH, YEAH, I *HEAR* HER! WE'RE PRACTICALLY *FLYIN' NOW*, PAL!

BEEP

THUNK

BLAMM

CRAPE

HEY YA GODDAMN *MORON!*

CLANG

SCREW

@☆?!◎

...FASTER!... PLEASE!..

CAB

CAB

YER BOTH NUTS!

THERE'S ANOTHER *THOUSAND* IN IT FOR YOU IF YOU HIT SEVENTY...

SEVENTY! NUTHIN' DOIN'! THIS IS *SUICIDE* AS IT IS!

ALL I COULD THINK ABOUT WAS THE *BILLS* I HAD... THE *CRUMMY FLAT* I LIVED IN...

50 60 7

THE ONLY WAY I COULD HIT SEVENTY WAS IN OPEN COUNTRY... I HEADED ACROSS THE RIVER...

HEY!

MANIAC!

CRUNCH

HONK

SCREECH

MY HANDS WERE *WELDED* TO THE WHEEL, MY FOOT *FLAT* AGAINST THE FLOOR.

THAT'S ALL! THAT'S TOP-END! WE'RE DOIN *SEVENTY!*

...YES...YES...*YES!* *THAT'S IT!*...

THAT'S ALMOST IT!

IT'S TOO *DARK* OUT HERE! *I GOTTA SLOW DOWN!*

NO! HOLD IT AT SEVENTY!

JUST ANOTHER *MINUTE! HOLD IT!*

OH *SWEET JESUS!*

NO THROUGH ROAD

SKREEE

WHAM

CRUNCH

YES! YES YOU DID IT!

CRASH

CAB

NO PAIN ... THAT WAS THE INCREDIBLE PART, NO PAIN AT ALL, JUST THE NIGHT SKY, THE STARS, THE SMOKING TWISTED WRECKAGE AROUND ME AND THE CERTAINTY I WAS DYIN'...

MY NECK WOULDN'T MOVE... BUT MY EYES DID... I CAUGHT A LOOK AT MY REFLECTION IN THE DANGLING REAR-VIEW MIRROR... IT WASN'T PRETTY

THEN I SAW THEM ... THE TWO PALE SKINNY KIDS STANDING THERE LOOKIN' DOWN AT ME... AND NOT A *MARK* ON 'EM...

YER DYIN' MISTER...

BUT MY GIRLFRIEND WANTS ME TO TELL YOU THAT YOU DID REAL *GOOD*... IT WAS REAL NICE... MY GIRLFRIEND WANTS ME TO THANK YOU..

THEY TURNED THEN, WALKED UP THE RAVINE TO THE ROAD, WHERE ANOTHER CAR'S HEAD-LIGHTS WERE JUST ROUNDING THE CORNER TOWARD TOWN...

EVERYTHING STARTED GOIN' DARK THEN... BUT NOT BEFORE I SAW THAT IT WAS ANOTHER *YELLOW CAB* THEY WERE FLAGGIN' DOWN...

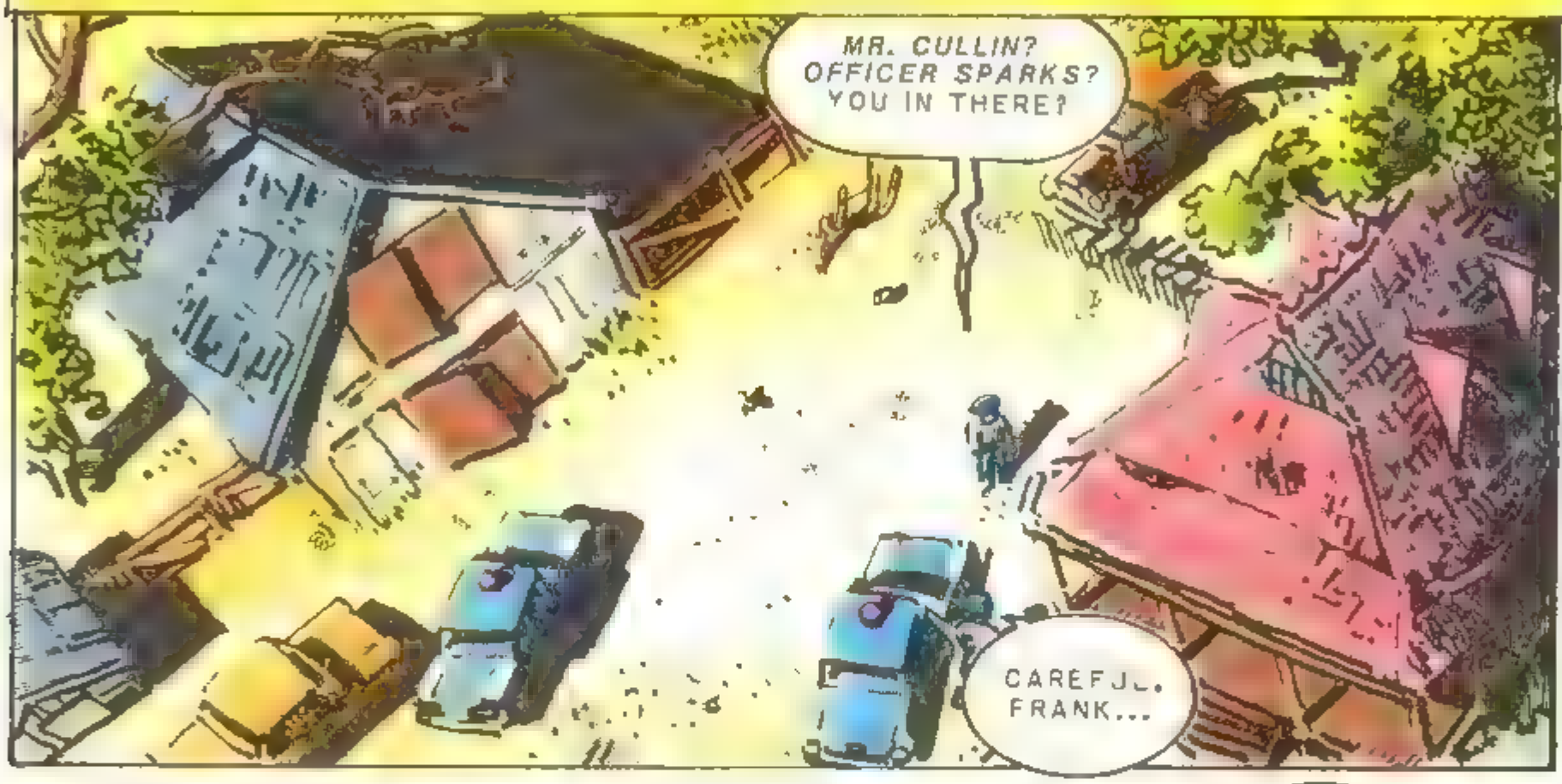
...NOT BEFORE I HEARD THEM SPEAK...

WHERE TO KIDS ?

MY GIRLFRIEND LIKES IT FAST...

"ME AN' OL' REX"

THE TRAIL WEED AN' JOHNSON GRASS IS UP NOW ... IT'S SUMMER FOR SURE. AH BEEN WAITIN FER IT ALL YEAR AN' NOW IT'S HERE. AH AIN'T GONNA BE 'ROUND TO ENJOY IT. WELL. THAS HOW THE BREEZE BREAKS. AS OL' REX WOULD SAY. REX IS MAH PAW. AH'M GONNA MISS HIM ALOT... EVEN IF HE WAS GETTIN' A MIGHT GONE THAR TOWARD THE END... AH'M GONNA MISS THE OL' FARM TOO... YEP...



STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: RICHARD CORBEN
Colors: Steve Oliff Letters: Richard Corben

THE DAY AH FOUND REX JR. WAS TYPICAL IN HOLCUM COUNTY. AH HAD BEEN GOOFIN' OFF IN CLASS AS USUAL, DRAWIN' PITCHERS WHEN I SHOULDA BEEN STUDYIN'...

MISS TRUNDLE SHE DON'T COTTON TO THET MUCH...

--BEAT SOME *UH* BRAINS INTO YER *UH* THICK HIDE, JASON CULLIN!

AH HADDA STAY AFTER AND WRITE *"I SHALL NOT BE DISOBEDIENT"* FIVE HUNDRED TIMES ON THE BLACKBOARD. NATCHERLY WILBER RUKUS WAS WAITIN' FER ME OUTSIDE, ALSO AS USUAL...

'LO, TURD FACE...

WHATCHA GIVE ME FER NOT BEATIN' THE *CRAP* OUTTA YA TODAY, CULLIN?

AH AIN'T GOT NO MORE QUARTERS, WILBER...

GEE... THAS TOO BAD, BOY...

AH HATED THET PECKER-HEAD. THAR WAS ONLY *ONE* PERSON IN THE WORLD WHAT GAVE WORSE BEATINGS THAN WILBER RUKUS...

THET YEW OUT THAR YA GOOD FOR NUTHIN' LIL SNIPE?

EVEN N', PA...

DON'T CALL ME PA, YA LITTLE *GRUB WORM!* AIN'T OWN N UP TA S.R N' THE LIKES A YOU! MAH NAME'S REX! *REX CULLIN!* DON'T NEVER CALL ME PA, YA HEAR?

FEATHER-BRAINED LITTLE *SWAMP RAT.* NOW GIT AT YER CHORES AND BR.NG ME SUM GRUB! AH'M HAF STARVED!

THE CROPS HAD MOSTLY DIED AN ONLY ONE HEFER AND THE SEED B.LL WAS LEFT SINCE PA -AH MEAN REX - T.[illegible] AH TR.DGED TO THE BARN TO SEE FA THE HENS HAD LAID ANYTHIN AH COULD FIX DINNER WIF...

BETTY WAS DRY AN' ISABELLE HADN'T LAID IN A WEEK AN' HENRETTA WAS DEAD. AH'S FIXING TO SIDLE DOWN TO THE BROOK FER A BLUEGILL WHEN AH SAW IT PEEKIN' OUT FRUM UNDER THE LAYIN TROUGH ALL BACK UNDER THE SHADDERS...

JUMPIN JEEZUS, S THET AN EGG?

AH GUESS IT WAS THE HEAT O MY HAND THET COMMENCED IT TO CRACKIN' OPEN...

WHILAKERS!

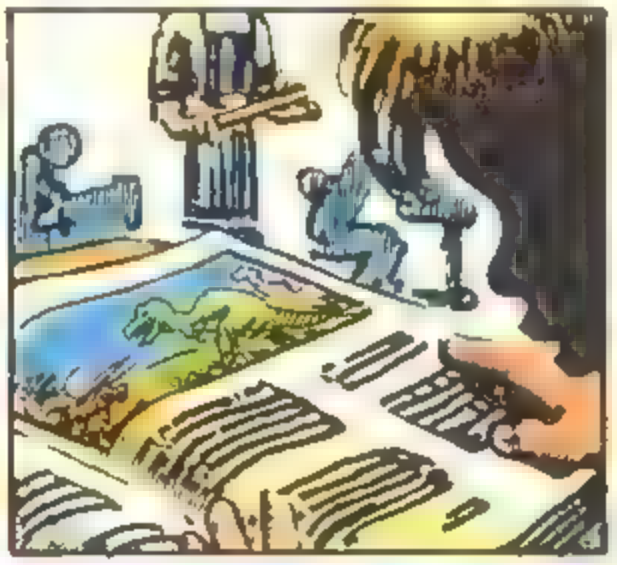
SHAT! IT'S A LIZARD!

GLEEP GLEEP

AH ALLUS WANTED ME A LITTLE SPOTTED PUPPY DOG. ONLY PA WOULDN'T ALLOW IT. HE DIDN'T WANT NUTHIN' AROUND HE COULDN'T EAT OR KICK. SO AH HID THE LITTLE CRITTER THAR IN THE THE BARN...

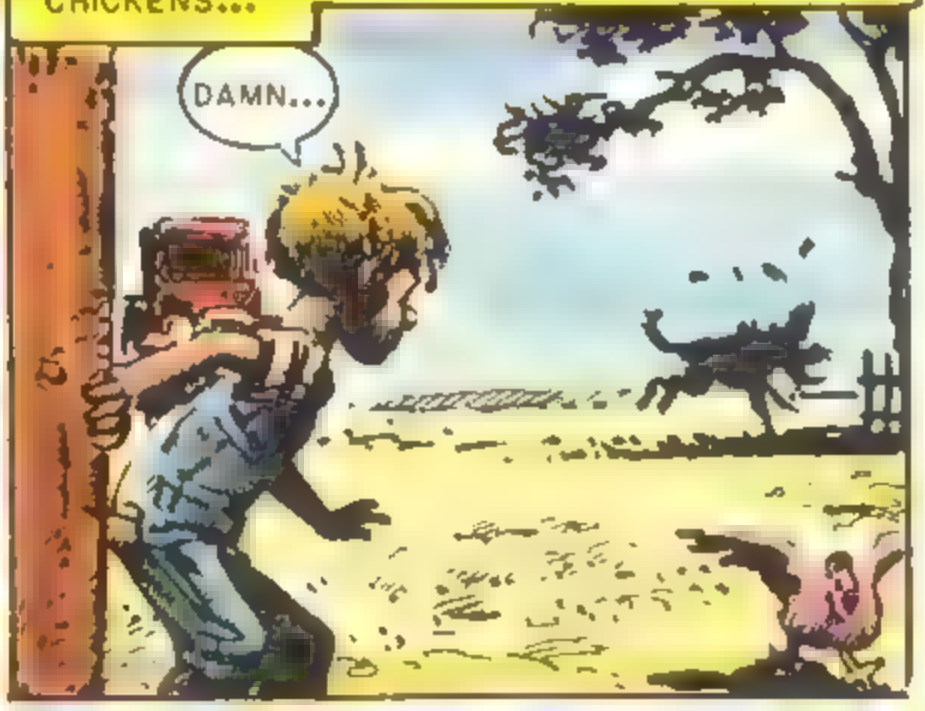
AH KILT A SQUIRREL ON THE LOWER FORTY AN' GAVE HAF TO PA AND HAF TO THE CRITTER...

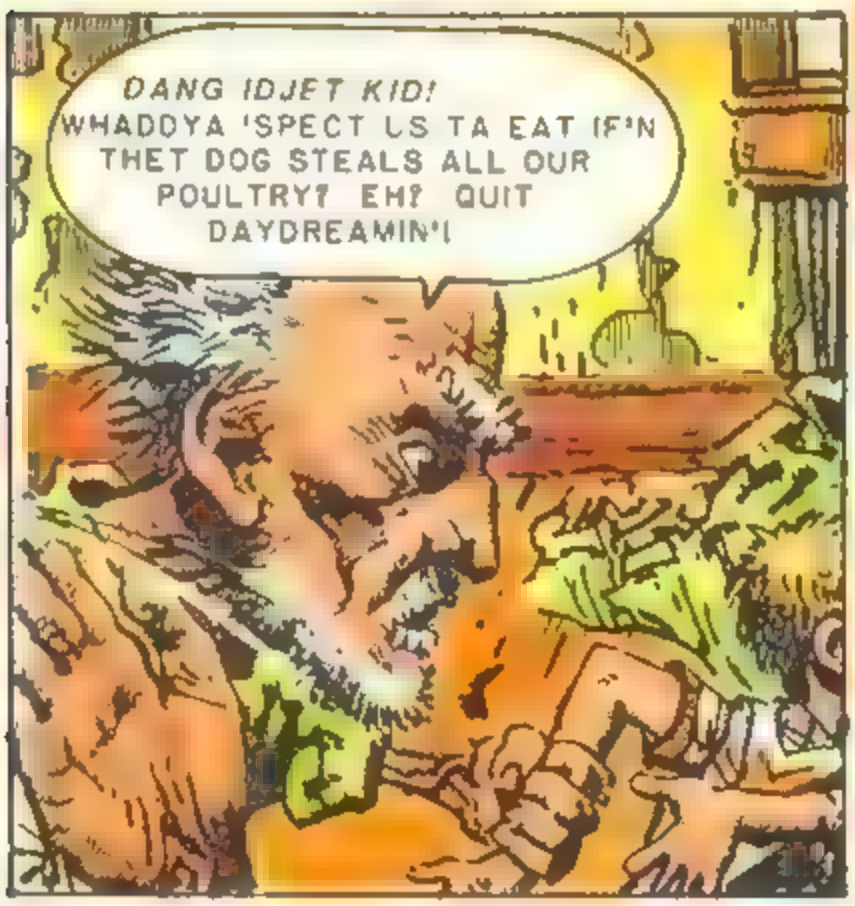
THET NEXT DAY AH LOOKED THE CRITTER UP IN THE SCHOOL NATCHERL HISTR'Y BOOK. HE WAS CALLED TYRANA-SOMETHIN' REX AN' HE WAS A GENUINE DINOSAUR! AH KNEW NO ONE'D BELIEVE AH HAD A REAL PET DINOSAUR AT HOME SO AH JES' KEP MAH MOUTH SHET!



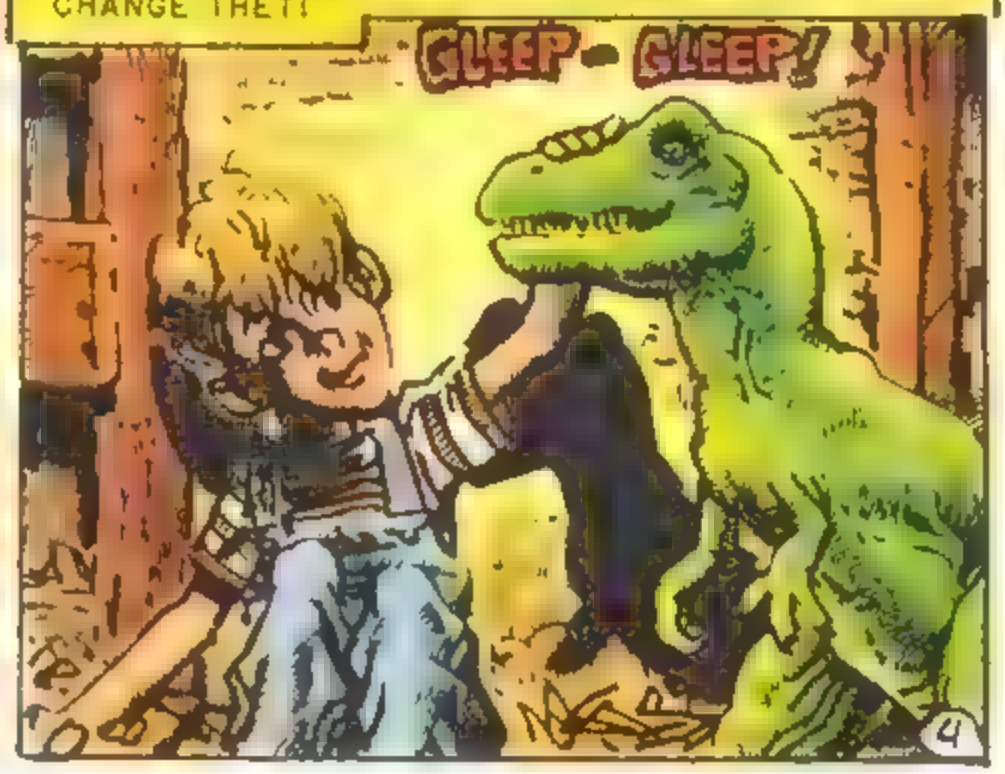
THET L TTLE TYKE SHORE GROWED FAST! AH HAD TO PROMOTE HIM FRJM SQUIRREL TO FOX INS DE A MONTH! AH NAMED HIM REX, AFTER PA AND AFTER HIS OWN NATCHERL NAME...

SOMET MES AH SPENT TOO MUCH TIME TAKEN' CARE O' REX INSTEAD OF TENDIN' TO MAH REGLAR CHORES--LIKE WATCHIN' TO SEE THE M LLER'S DOG DON'T MAKE OFF WITH PA'S CHICKENS...





BUT NO MATTER HOW OFFEN PA BEAT ME, AH STILL HAD LITTLE REX TO COME BACK TO! HE LOVED ME LIKE HIS OWN KIN! WE WUZ PALS AN' NOBODY CUD CHANGE THET!



LIFE WENT ON. W'F REX T WAS A LOT MORE PLEASANT... BUT SOME TH NGS NEVER CHANGE...

LO, TURD FACE...

SOMEDAY THAT PECKER-HEAD WILBUR RUKUS WUZ GONNA PAY...

IT WAS THET VERY AFTERNOON THET THE WHOLE BIZNEZ WITH REX STARTED, I RECKON...

BLOOD! WIF DOG HAIR IN IT...

REX! *JUMPIN' JEEPERS!*

GLEEP-GLEEP!

REX HAD BEEN AT THE MILLER'S COLLIE! HE MUSTA GOT OUTTA THE BARN WHEN AH WUZ AT SCHOOL! AH GOT A LENGTH OF CHAIN FROM THE BACK AND STAKED HIM TO IT...

NOW YOU BE A GOOD BOY ELSE PA WILL MAKE ME GET RID O' YA!

GRRRR!

BUT LATER THET AFTERNOON...

WHERE'S MAH PRIZE COLLIE? YOU POISONED HIM, CULLIN, I *KNOW* YOU DID.

N—NO, MR. MILLER— WAIT!

WELL? WHERE IS HE, BOY?

H—HE'S RIGHT IN HERE, SIR... AH GOT HIM RIGHT HERE IN THE BARN...

WHERE? I DON'T SEE NUTHIN IN THIS DARK!

JUS' A LITTLE FURTHER, MR. MILLER... JUS' ANOTHER COUPLE FEET...

MR. MILLER WOULDA TOLE PA... PA WOULDA SHOT REX... I COULDN'T LET HIM DO THET...

HEY! OPEN THET DOOR! I-- WHAT TH--

YAGGGHHHHHHHHHH!

MR. MILLER'S SCREAMS WAS TERRIBLE -- B'T PA WAS MOSTLY DEAF BY THEN... AH DIDN'T SLEEP SO WELL THET NIGHT B'T REX, HE SLEPT JUS FINE... HE HADN'T NEVER ET THET WELL AFORE...

NEXT DAY AT SCHOOL AH COULDN'T KEEP MAH EYES OPEN...

DISOBEDIENT AGAIN, ARE WE? WELL, WE'LL JUST SEE HOW A LITTLE TALK WITH YOUR FATHER SUITS YOU!

AH DON'T KNOW WHAT MADE ME DO IT.. REX WASN'T IN NO REAL DANGER... AH GUESS AH JUS' ALL'S HATED THAT OL' MISS TRUNDLE...

OVER HERE! MISS TRUNDLE... PA'S IN THE BARN...

I CAN'T *SEE*, JASON! WHY DID YOU SHUT THE DOOR? WHY DID YOU-- *EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!*

AFTER THET IT WAS EASY... AH JUS' COULDN'T SEEM TO STOP... BUT ONLY WITH THEM WHAT WAS MEAN TO ME...

YOU GOT THE MONEY? WHERE?

AT HOME. C'MON... AH'LL SHOW YA...

T WARN'T SO SIMPLE W TH WILBUR... HE WAS FASTER N THE OTHERS... HE RAN ALL OVER THE BARN AFORE REX CAUGHT H M

NO! NO! MAW! MAW, HELP ME! YAGGGHHHHH!!

AH RECKON AH KNEW WHAT WOULD FOLLOW... THE FIRST COP CAR CAME A WEEK LATER. OFFICER SPARKS WAS THE MAN'S NAME...

MY PA? HE'S IN THE BARN, OFFICER...

MR. CULLIN? YOU IN HERE?

OH MY - NO! OH GOD, YAGGGGHHHH!

AH KNOWED WHOT AH HAD TO DO THEN... THAR WARN T NO OTHER WAY...

EASY REX... GOOD BOY...

GLEEP-GLEEP!

THEY'LL COME FOR YA, REX... THEY'LL COME IN FORCE WITH BIG GUNS AN' THEY'LL SHOOT YA AN' STUFF YA AN' PUT YA ON DISPLAY... AH CAIN'T LET 'EM DO THET TO YA, BOY...

AH LOVE YA, REX... EVEN THO AH CAIN'T EVEN GET NEAR YA NOW... AH RECKON YA JUS' GONE A LITTLE CRAZY, BOY... AH RECKON WE BOTH HAS...

BUT NO MATTER HOW AH TRIED, AH JUS' COULDN'T BRING MAHSELF TO SHOOT MAH OL' PAL... SO AH DONE THE NEXT BEST THANG...

KER-BLAM!

WHAT A MESSI ANY LEADS YET, FRANK?

YEAH, IT'S A SUICIDE FOR SURE, THE KID'S PRINTS CHECK OUT...

KID WAS AN ARTIST.

GRRR

YEAH, LIKED DINOSAURS... LIVED IN A KINDA DREAM WORLD, THE DOC SAYS...

TOO BAD HE WASN'T SO FOND OF HIS TEACHER AND HIS NEIGHBORS...

THE KID DID THIS?

YEAH, WE FIGURE HE LED THEM INTO THE BARN TO HIS PA AND THEN LOCKED THEM INSIDE...

AND OL' REX DID THE REST. IT FIGURES, HE LOOKS HALF CRAZY WITH STARVATION...

BUT WHY'D THE KID CHAIN HIM UP OUT HERE, FRANK?

WHO KNOWS? YOU GIVE THESE KIDS LOVE AND A GOOD HOME AND LOOK HOW THEY TURN OUT...

GLEEP-GLEEP!

Off Key

SCRIPT: BRUCE JONES
ART: DOUG WILDEY

FREE! FREE! FREE AT LAST! NO MORE PETULANT ACTORS. NO MORE MYOPIC DIRECTORS!

NO MORE ASININE PRODUCERS SAYING, "GREAT, RICK, BUT COULD YOU PUT IN A LITTLE MORE ACTION HERE ON PAGE SIX ...

AND OH, BY THE WAY, WE'RE CHANGING THE WHOLE FILM TO A PERIOD PIECE!"

HA-HA! FREE! FREE! I WON'T GO BACK! I'LL NEVER GO BACK! THEY CAN'T MAKE ME GO BACK!

SILLY GOOSE. WE'RE BOTH GOING BACK IN A WEEK.

I PROCLAIM THIS ISLAND IN THE NAME OF RICK WASHBURN, SCREENWRITER EXTRAORDINAIRE. NO-NO-- EX-SCREENWRITER EXTRA-ORDINAIRE!

COME OFF IT, TOOTS YOU'LL NEVER QUIT. YOU LIKE YOUR CHRISCRAFT TOO MUCH.

LOOK AT IT, PAT! PARADISE ON EARTH! AND IT'S ALL OURS

--FOR THE WEEKEND, AFTER WHICH IT BECOMES ALL NED PATTERSON'S AGAIN, AND WE GO BACK TO L.A. AND REALITY.

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: DOUG WILDEY
Letters. Carrie McCarthy

REMEMBER THAT BEFORE YOU START PLANNING THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL AGAIN.

--SO I TOLD RON I SAID, *LOOK* RON, I DON'T *WANT* TO WRITE A SCIENCE FICTION HORROR MOVIE, EVERYBODY

AND HIS BLOODY *BROTHER* IS WRITING A SCIENCE FICTION HORROR MOVIE, WHAT THE HELL EVER HAPPENED TO PICTURES LIKE "THE PUMPKIN EATER" AND "THE INNOCENTS" WHERE PEOPLE *TALKED* ONCE IN A WHILE--

..STUFFY IN HERE...

--AND RON SAYS, GET THIS, RON SAYS: LOOK, PAL, YOU WANNA MAKE *MONEY OR ART?" MONEY OR GODDAMN ART!* CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT? WHAT DOES HE THINK I AM, A BUSH LEAGUER? JESUS.

--"CASABLANCA" MADE MONEY, DIDN'T IT? GODDAMN 'LION IN WINTER' MADE MONEY DIDN'T IT?

I'M TENSE HUH?

IS THIS GOING TO HELP?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

YOU'RE TENSE...

VERY TENSE. EXTREMELY TENSE

OH, UNEQUIVOCALLY. INDUBITABLY. ABSOLUTELY. DID YOU REMEMBER THE BOURBON?

I THINK I'M IN LOVE...LET'S GET *MARRIED*.

WE *ARE* MARRIED

ARE WE? GEE, SEEMS LIKE ONLY YESTER--

OKAY, OKAY, I'LL GET THE DRINKS!

WHAT IF HE BLOWS IT, PAT? WHAT IF HE CAN'T THINK OF ANY BETTER ENDING FOR THAT GARBAGE THAN I DID?

NED PATTERSON IS A GIFTED SCREENWRITER AND YOUR BEST FRIEND, HE WON'T BLOW IT. TAKE MY WORD FOR IT--

EEEEEE

RICK! OH GOD! RICK! RICK!

THEY'RE *EATING* ME OH CHRIST, THEY'RE EATING ME *ALIVE!*

PAT! PAT!

THE *LIVING ROOM!* GET INTO THE *LIVING ROOM!*

AGGH!

RICK! YOU'RE SETTING ME *AFIRE!*

A-ARE THEY GONE? D-DID YOU GET THEM?

YEAH, HONEY, I THINK SO.. GOD, WHERE DID THEY *COME* FROM?

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

STRANGE... NED NEVER MENTIONED ANY TARANTULAS ON THE ISLAND BEFORE. WHERE *DID* THEY COME FROM?

PAT?

PAT?

HONEY? WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT OF BED?

HEY... IS THAT A *KNIFE?*

AAAAAA

PAT? ANSWER M-- *DEAR GOD!*

PAT! PAT! SNAP *OUT* OF IT! *PAT!*

PAT? WHAT *IS* IT?

AAAAAAAA

MY GOD, SHE'S *CHOKING! PAT!*

...R-RICK? (GASP!) W-WHAT *HAPPENED?*

I-I'M NOT SURE! YOU WERE CHOKING OR SOMETHING, DON'T YOU REMEMBER THE KNIFE?

KNIFE?

TAP TAP TAP

LORD, *NOW* WHAT?

TAP TAP TAP

RICK! B-BE *CAREFUL*, *HONEY*, IT MIGHT BE A—

EEEE!

CRASH!!

THE *GUN!* GET (GASP!) NED'S *RIFLE* FROM THE HALL *CLOSET!*

MY *GOD*, WHAT'S *HAPPENING* TO *US*, WHAT'S *HAPPENING?*

WHA--WHERE *IS* IT? WHERE DID IT *GO?*

V-VANISHED... IT JUST *VANISHED!*

OUT THE WINDOW?

NO...I MEAN LITERALLY *VANISHED!*

MY GOD, THIS S LIKE A *HORROR* STORY' ARE YOU HURT?

NO...NOT A *SCRATCH* NOW, AND YET A MOMENT AGO TS FANGS WERE--*MY GOD*, COULD .T BE *POSSIBLE?*

WHAT, HONEY?

WHAT YOU SA.D ABOUT A HORROR STORY...OR A *SCREENPLAY*. .KE SOME-THING I WOULD *WRITE* ...OR SOME-TH NG *NED* WOULD WR.TE!

WHAT RE YOU TALK NG ABOUT?

LOOK AT THE W NDOW PAT T SN'T *BROKEN* NOW.

MY GOD, YOU RE R GHT

IT S THE MOVIE.--THE SCRIPT. THE SCRIPT I GAVE TO NED PATTERSON BECAUSE I COULDN'T THINK OF AN END NG! ONLY HE *DID* THINK OF AN ENDING-- *SEVERAL* ENDINGS

AND HE S *STILL* THINKING OF THEM.

THE *SCREENPLAY*--"*THE TERROR IN THE WOODS*"! .T'S ABOUT *US*! REMEMBER? THE COUPLE .N THE SCRIPT EVEN HAVE *OUR* NAMES, *RICK* AND *PAT*! WE'RE *LIVING* .T!

I (CHOKE) I ALWAYS WANTED MORE REAL.SM .N MOV.ES...NOW I (CHOKE) I'VE *GOT* .T...

DARLING...YOU VE HAD A *TERRIBLE* FR.GHT, YOU'RE *EXHAUSTED*! YOU RE .MAG NING--

AM I? D.D I .MAGINE THAT YOU ATTACKED ME A FEW MINUTES AGO WITH A *BUTCHER KNIFE?*

C'MON!

WE'RE GETTING *OUT* OF HERE.

WAIT A MINUTE, RICK. WHERE ARE WE GOING? IT'S ONE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING!

YEAH! EXACTLY THE TIME NED PATTERSON LIKES TO WORK AT HIS DESK! C'MON!

EEEGH! RICK!

MY GOD... RATS!

OUTSIDE, HURRY. THE BOAT!

CRASH!

THAT'S (GASP!) WHY THE SPIDERS AND THE LYNX JUST VANISHED THAT WAY--NED CHANGED THE PLOT-- STOPPED WRITING ABOUT THEM!

RRRRRR

HURRY, RICK, THEY'RE ALL OVER THE DOCK!

WHATEVER HAPPENS IN THE SCRIPT HAPPENS TO US! IT'S THE ONLY ANSWER!

RICK, THAT'S INSANE!

MAYBE BUT IT'S THE ONLY A--A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A!

RICK. WHAT IS IT? DARLING YOU'RE CHOKING!

RICK! OH MY GOD, HE'S DYING!

RICK? HONEY?

I'M (CHOKE!) OKAY NOW... (GASP!) IT'S OVER! I CAN BREATHE AGAIN...

C'MON, WE'VE GOT TO GET TO THE CAR BEFORE NED WRITES ANYTHING ELSE.

SOON...

SNOW? IN JULY? WHAT IN...

IT'S *NED!* HE'S CHANGED THE *SCRIPT* AGAIN! HE'S MADE IT A WINTER SETTING!

THE ENGINE'S FROZEN *SOLID!* WE'LL HAVE TO *HOOF* IT!

OH RICK WE'LL *FREEZE* TO DEATH OUT HERE.

T-THERE'S NED'S P-PLACE N-NOW!

C-CAN'T M-MAKE IT...

I-IT'S *SUMMER* AGAIN. HE'S CHANGED THE *SCRIPT,* PAT.

HEY WHAT'RE YOU TWO VACATIONERS DOING HERE? THOUGHT YOU WERE ON *THE ISLAND!*

THE *SCRIPT,* NED, WHERE'S THE *SCRIPT?*

DON'T WORRY, I THOUGHT OF A *TERRIFIC* ENDING! THE COUPLE GETS SWALLOWED UP IN AN *EARTHQUAKE!*

OH MY GOD! *NO!*

NED! THEY *DIE?*

YEAH, *GREAT,* HUH? DIDN'T GET TO FINISH IT, THOUGH... BLASTED OLD TYPEWRITER OF MINE KEPT JAMMING ON ME...

...ESPECIALLY THE "A KEY...

end.

WITH HONOR

AUGUST 26, 1942, SOMEWHERE IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC...

WE (GASP!) WE **MADE** IT, NITAKI! WE (CHOKE!) **MADE** IT! I TOLD YOU IT WAS AN ISLAND! I (GASP) **TOLD** YOU!

YES, KURUSU, BUT (GASP!) **WHAT** ISLAND... (CHOKE!) **WHERE?**

OUR TROOP SHIP IS SUNK...WE HAVE NO SUPPLIES ...AND (CHOKE!) **WORST** OF ALL, WE ARE IN **ENEMY** WATERS!

NO MATTER: I STILL HAVE THE PHOTOGRAPH OF MY BELOVED WIFE SENSU. SEE, NITAKI, IT IS HARDLY WET!

AND I STILL HAVE MY FAITHFUL BUSHIDO BLADE! EVEN IF THE HATED ENEMY FINDS US, I CAN DIE WITH HONOR!

NITAKI, LOOK! A BOAT! IS IT THE ENEMY?

STAY HIDDEN, KURUSU, I WILL INVESTIGATE! NO SENSE IN RISKING BOTH OUR LIVES!

KURUSU WAITS IN AGONIZED SILENCE AS HIS FRIEND DISAPPEARS INTO THE GLOOM. AFTER WHAT SEEMS AN ETERNITY, THERE IS A RUSTLING IN THE THICK UNDERGROWTH...

NITAKI?

IT IS ONE OF OUR SHIPS, KURUSU! WE ARE SAFE!

著者 BRUCE JONES 美術 Bill Wray '93

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: BILL WRAY
Colors: Steve Oliff Letters: Carrie McCarthy

BUT KURUSU'S JOY IS SHORT-LIVED...

THERE IS ROOM FOR ONLY ONE ON THE CRAFT, KURUSU! THEY INSIST IT TO BE SOMEONE WITH MY RANK. BUT DO NOT FEAR, I WILL RETURN FOR YOU. MEANWHILE, TAKE MY FAITHFUL BUSHIDO BLADE, THAT YOU MIGHT FACE ANY DANGER WITH HONOR!

WAIT! I HAVE SOMETHING FOR YOU...

IT IS MY BELOVED SENSU! OUR HOME ADDRESS IS WRITTEN ON THE BACK!

TRY TO GET A MESSAGE THROUGH TO HER!

FEAR NOT, MY FRIEND! SAYONARA!

THAT FIRST NIGHT ALONE ON THE ISLAND WAS THE WORST OF KURUSU'S LIFE...

FOOD ON THE ISLAND WAS UNVARIED BUT PLENTIFUL. THE WORST PART WAS THE TERRIBLE WAITING. KURUSU LOST ALL SENSE OF TIME... THEN, AFTER DAYS...

HIROHITO HIMSELF KNOWS OF YOUR BRAVERY! YOU ARE TO REMAIN HERE AS AN ADVANCE GUARD UNTIL TROOPS CAN LAND NEXT MONTH! THE AREA IS SURROUNDED BY THE ENEMY SO STAY LOW! AND BE STRONG, KURUSU, IT HAS ONLY BEEN ONE MONTH.

SENSU...

MY LOVELY SENSU...

WAIT FOR ME...

NITAKI!

KURUSU, MY FRIEND! I BRING GOOD NEWS! YOUR WIFE IS WELL, AND THE WAR, THEY SAY, WILL END SOON!

...R-REMAIN??..

KEEP A KEEN EDGE ON MY BLADE, KURUSU! TO DIE WITH THE BUSHIDO IS TO DIE WITH HONOR!

KURUSU SETTLED DOWN TO WAIT ONCE MORE, QUIETLY RUNNING A JAGGED PIECE OF FLINT ALONG THE EDGE OF NITAKI'S GLEAMING BLADE. MOST OF THE TIME HE SLEPT... BUT FOR HOURS OR DAYS HE COULD NOT TELL...

SLAP!

BY LIGHT HE PICKED THE DATES AND BANANAS THAT WERE HIS SUSTENANCE... BY NIGHT HE LISTENED TO THE EVER-PRESENT ENEMY MARCHING SOMEWHERE JUST OUT OF SIGHT...

THE SUN ROSE...THE SUN FELL, NIGHT BLURRED INTO DAY, THE ISLAND HELD NO SEASONS, TIME LOST ALL MEANING...

BUT AT LAST...

...SENSU...

NITAKI!

KURUSU, MY FRIEND! YOU ARE STILL ALIVE! PRAISE THE GODS!

TAKE ME TO THE SHIP, NITAKI! I WANT TO GO HOME!

IT IS NOT POSSIBLE, MY FRIEND! THE ENTIRE JAPANESE NAVY HAS SURROUNDED THE ISLAND! TOMORROW WE STRIKE! YOU MUST BE HERE TO LEAD THE WAY!

BUT NITAKI, I--

YOU WILL BE A HERO, MY FRIEND! A GREAT HERO! YOU CAN TELL YOUR GRANDCHILDREN YOU LIVED WITH GREAT HONOR! YOU HAVE ONLY BEEN HERE A YEAR, YOU WILL NOT HAVE TO WAIT MUCH LONGER!

BUT MY WIFE, SENSU! AT LEAST LET ME SEE HER PICTURE!

ALONE AGAIN...IMPOSSIBLY ALONE...KURUSU FELT THE EMPTINESS OF DESPAIR RISING IN HIS DRY THROAT...

...YET NITAKI SAID TOMORROW... I HAVE WAITED SO LONG...PERHAPS ONE MORE DAY...

AND ALWAYS NEARBY, SOMETIMES SO CLOSE HE COULD ALMOST REACH OUT AND TOUCH THEM, WAS THE EVER-PRESENT ENEMY..

MY LAST RATION TIN... I HOPE YOU WILL COME SOON, NITAKI, SO I CAN-- WHAT IN--*NITAKI!* *NO!*

NOOO

MONTHS LATER...

KURUSU! KURUSU, MY FRIEND, WHERE ARE YOU? IT IS NITAKI! I HAVE RETURNED!

AGHH!

SHUNK!

TO DIE WITH HONOR, BY THE POINT OF THE BUSH DO BLADE, THAT IS WHAT YOU ALWAYS WANTED. WELL, NOW YOU HAVE IT, NITAKI...NOW YOU HAVE IT!

...K KURUSU (GASP.)...

AND WHAT IS THIS MY FRIEND?

A PICTURE OF YOU AND MY BEAUTIFUL WIFE?

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN LOVE WITH HER, NITAKI; FROM THE FIRST MOMENT I SHOWED YOU HER PICTURE ON THE BEACH? DID YOU TELL HER I WAS DEAD?

AGGH!

YANK!

HOW... DID.. YOU.. FIND.. OUT?

THE SUPPLIES YOU SO UNSELFISHLY BROUGHT ME IN TAK... THE TIN CANS...*ONE* YEAR YOU SAID, NITAKI--BUT THE CANS WERE *DATED!*

KURUSU TOSSES AS DE THE BUSH DO BLADE IN DISGUST AND WALKS OUT OF THE CLEARING... FOR THE *FIRST TIME* IN *FIFTEEN YEARS!*

HE WALKS THROUGH THE JUNGLE... PAST THE BULLDOZERS... PAST THE HURRICANE FENCE... PAST THE ***U.S. MARINE CORPS TRAINING BASE...*** TOWARD THE AIRPORT THAT WILL TAKE H.M ONCE MORE TO HIS LITTLE WIFE SENSU... TO ***HOME...***

SUNKEN CHEST

SCOTT SAGGED DESULTORILY AGAINST THE TEAKWOOD SMOOTHNESS OF THE HELM, WATCHING WITH DISINTERESTED EYES THE DECK-WATER SLOSHING LAZILY ACROSS THE GUNWALE AND THROUGH THE SCUPPERS. THE MANDY LEE ROCKED EASILY IN THE SWELLS, SLIDING INTO THE CALMING LEE OF THE TROUGH, THEN OBEDIENTLY MOUNTING THE NEXT CREST. HANSON SAT NEARBY IN THE FIGHTING CHAIR, HEELS STATIONED DRAMATICALLY AGAINST THE FOOT BRACE AS IF EXPECTING THE PULL OF SOMETHING THE SIZE OF A SPERM WHALE AT ANY MOMENT. HE CLUTCHED THE BIG JOHNSON REEL IN ONE CHUBBY HAND, A HALF-DOWNED CAN OF COORS IN THE OTHER. HIS FIFTH COORS THAT HOUR. AFT, STRETCHED OUT IN COOL INVITING LINES THAT DID MORE FOR A BIKINI THAN SCOTT HAD EVER BEFORE SEEN, HANSON'S WIFE JILL MONOPOLIZED THE FOREDECK... MUCH THE SAME WAY SHE HAD MONOPOLIZED SCOTT'S THOUGHTS FOR THE PAST FOUR DAYS.

FOUR DAYS...THIRTY TWO HOURS. SCOTT HAD SAT OR STOOD OR HUNKERED OR LEANED, WATCHING THE THICK LENGTH OF THAT LINE FROM THE FAT MAN'S ROD LIE MOTIONLESS IN THE GREEN DEPTHS. MOTIONLESS. WHILE THE SUN ABOVE GREW HOTTER...AND THE BIKINI BELOW GREW MORE INVITING ..

GIVE US THER BEER HUH BABE?

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: BRET BLEVINS
Colors: Steve Oliff Letters: Carrie McCarthy

WHY DON'T YOU LAY OFF AWHILE—GIVE YOUR BLOODSTREAM A CHANCE TO BREATHE?

YOU GOT ANY *BETTER* IDEAS FOR ENTERTAINMENT ABOARD THIS TUB? IT SURE AIN'T IN THE FISH N. BURRRP.

HOW ABOUT I REARRANGE WHERE'S ALL THESE BIG *MARLIN* YOU PROMISED US? REMEMBER YOU DON'T COME ACROSS WITH THE FISH I DON'T COME ACROSS WITH THE *DOUGH!*

HE DIDN'T *HAVE* TO BE REMINDED...THE MANDY LEE WAS *DEEPLY* IN DEPT; IF HANSON DON'T PAY UP THIS WOULD BE HER LAST VOYAGE *LOOK* AT THE BIG TUB OF SUDS, SITTING THERE WITH A FAT ROLL OF BILLS UNDER HIS FAT BANKER'S BUTT. SCOTT FELT HIS SCALP CRAWL..

AIN'T TO *HELL* WITH THIS. THEY'RE *NEVER* GONNA BITE C'MON BABE LET'S GO BELOW AND GET SOME *REAL* BOOZE

PLEASE TED I'D RATHER GET SOME MORE SUN.

YER TANNED ENOUGH *ALREADY*- BURRRP! C'MON JOLLY SHE DADDY LOOKS..

NO TED I DON'T--

I SAID *C'MON!*

WELL? WHAT'RE *YOU* LOOKIN AT?

I-- ..NOTHING.. NOTHING.

SOB..

BASTARD! IF I DIDN'T NEED THE MONEY SO BAD--

"FIFTEEN MEN ON A DEAD MAN'S CHEST YO-HO-HO AND A BOTTLE OF RUM!" (BELCH.)

SCOTT STOOD RIGIDLY IMPOTENTLY FISTS BALLED PUNY AT HIS SIDE EYES GLUED TO THE LITTLE CABIN DOOR INTO WHICH THE COUPLE HAD DISAPPEARED HE WAS STILL STANDING THERE HALF AN HOUR LATER WHEN THE GIRL CAME BACK THROUGH ALONE

ALL RIGHT-- HE BEATS ME. HE DEGRADES ME IN BED, TOO, WHAT OF IT?

WHY? WHY DO YOU STAND FOR IT?

WHY, MR REARDON? FOR THE SAME REASON YOU DIDN'T INTERVENE ON MY BEHALF A FEW MINUTES AGO. I NEED THE MONEY! I NEED LOTS OF MONEY THAT'S THE KIND OF PERSON I AM TED'S GOT THE MONEY

I'D NEVER DIVORCE HIM, MR REARDON. I'M MORE AFRAID OF POVERTY THAN I AM HIS FISTS. BUT SOMETIMES LYING BESIDE HIM AT NIGHT LISTENING TO HIM SNORE, SOMETIMES.. I'VE WISHED HIM DEAD!

JILL! LISTEN TO ME--

"FIFTEEN MEN ON A DEAD MAN'S CHEST"--AHOY THERE. WHERE ARE YOU TWO? HOW DOES A MAN GET A DRINK AROUND HERE?

TWO MORE DAYS IN THE SWELTERING, TROPICAL SUN, AND NOT EVEN A *CURSORY* TUG ON HANSON'S LINE

"...YO-HO-HO AND A BOTTLE OF RUM!"

BAH! WHAT'S WRONG WITH THESE FISH AROUND?

HARD TO SAY... SOMETHING MIGHT BE *SCARING* THEM.. *SHARKS*, MAYBE...

TOO BAD. MAYBE YOU SHOULD TRY *SKIN-DIVING* DEAR

A LIGHT WENT ON SUDDENLY, BRILLIANTLY IN SCOTT'S HEAD

SAY, UH, THAT'S NOT SUCH A BAD IDEA MR. HANSON! YOU EVER BEEN SKIN DIVING BEFORE? *GREAT* SPORT. I'VE GOT EQUIPMENT ON BOARD, AND WE CAN *SHARE* THE SPEARGUN!

IT'S SAFE?

SURE! I KNOW A LITTLE ISLAND NOT FAR FROM HERE THAT HAS A BEAUTIFUL CORAL REEF *THOUSANDS* OF FISH YOU CAN *SPEAR* ONE. WHAT DO YOU SAY?

THREE HOURS LATER

OKAY, WE ANCHOR HERE AND WADE ASHORE. THE REEF'S ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISLAND. TOO MANY *ROCKS* TO ANCHOR THERE

GETTING DARK. YOU SURE IT'S NOT TO LATE FOR--

NAH. THAT'S WHEN THE FISH ARE MOST ABUNDANT

AND ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE TINY ISLAND...

GONNA GET ME A BIG GROUPER. HEH-HEH. "FIFTEEN MEN ON A DEAD MAN'S CHEST" YO-HO-HO..."

...AND A BOTTLE OF R... AGGHHH!

REARDON! A SHARK! 'S GOT ME HELP!

...OT A SHARK, HALSON A GIANT CLAM! 'S LAGOON S FULL OF 'EM! THEY'RE AS BIG AROUND AS 'ELLA 'ESS AND THEY DON' LET GO!

I DISCOVERED THEM A FEW YEARS BACK. ALTHO' I GOT CAUGHT MYSELF -BUT I WAS ABLE TO DRIVE MY SPEAR THROUGH THE ONLY VULNERABLE AREA. YOU'VE GOT S- KNIFE AND A KNIFE AIN' LONG ENOUGH

PLEASE! I'LL GIVE YOU ANYTHING! I'M RICH!

SO'S YOUR WIFE, HALSON AND WHEN YOU'RE DEAD SHE -- BE ALL THE RICHER! S LONG

THE 'DEVIL' WILL BE OVER HIS HEAD IN DEBT. SOON ONE AN ACCIDENT. PERHAPS THE PERFECT CRIME

REARDON! PLEASE! DON'T LEAVE ME!

SCOTT WALKED BACK SILENTLY TO THE OTHER END OF THE ISLAND GRINNING TO HIMSELF.. A GRIN THAT SOON TURNED TO A SHUDDER AS HIS OVERACTIVE IMAGINATION BEGAN TO VISUALIZE HALSON'S DEMISE

THE SCREAMING THE GURGLING THE PURPLE FACE THE SWOLLEN TONGUE THE BLOATED WATER FILLED LUNGS

HE WAITED AN HOUR IN THE DARKENING JUNGLE SHAKING THEN WADED BACK TO THE KETCH AND WENT INTO HIS ACT..

SCOTT? WHERE'S TED? WHAT HAPPENED?

(GASP) I DON'T KNOW!

HE STARTED FOLLOWING A BIG GROUPER OUT TO SEA. I WARNED HIM TO STAY CLOSE TO ME. ALL OF A SUDDEN HE JUST WASN'T THERE ANYMORE. I'M AFRAID HE MIGHT BE DEAD, JILL.

GOOD LORD!

IT'S JUST YOU AND ME NOW BABY YOU AND ME

MPH!

MY GOD, YOU MURDERED HIM!

BUT IT'S WHAT YOU WANTED, YOU SAID--

I SAID SOMETIMES I WISH HIM DEAD, NOT MURDERED! YOU FOOL, THEY'LL HANG US BOTH!

WHO I..

GO BACK! MAYBE HE'S STILL ALIVE. HURRY YOU IDIOT!

A COLD WEDGE OF FEAR PUNCHED AT SCOTT'S HEART AS HE SPLASHED BACK THROUGH THE DARK WATERS WITH THE UNDERWATER LAMP

M-MAYBE THE TIDE'S NOT IN YET!

AND SOON.

GONE. THE WATER'S OVER HIS HEAD

(GASP) BUT I'D BETTER MAKE SURE

HIS FOOT! STILL IN THE CLAM'S JAWS!

A GLINT OF COLD STEEL FLASHED IN THE YELLOW GLOW OF THE LAMP

HANSON'S KNIFE! MY GOD COULD IT BE POSSIBLE? DID HE CUT OFF HIS OWN FOOT?

SCOTT WADED ASHORE A BLACK DREAD WELLING INSIDE HIM AT THE EDGE OF THE JUNGLE A TWIG SNAPPED.

W-WHO'S THERE? H-HANSON?

"THUD"

WELL?

I-HE I-I COULDN'T FIND HIM HE'S GONE! COME ON LET'S TURN IN.

THEY BEDDED DOWN SCOTT TOSSING UNEASILY ALL NIGHT THEN TOWARD MORNING

"FIFTEEN MEN ON A DEAD MAN'S CHEST"

WHA-?

GASP! HANSON!

YO-HO-HO!

YAGGHH!

SCOTT WAKE UP IT'S A DREAM! YOU'RE DREAMING SCOTT?

DAWN.

C'MON, WE'RE GETTING OUT OF HERE. THIS PLACE IS DRIVING ME IN--

SCOTT, LOOK! COAST GUARD!

AHOY THERE! EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT, FOLKS?

SHIP SHAPE, OFFICER! JUST GETTING IN A LITTLE EARLY MORNING FISHING WITH THE WIFE.

92531

NEVER KNOW WHEN YOU'RE GOING TO LAND A--

HEY! YOU GOT ONE. HOLD HIM.

THAT'S IT. THAT'S IT-- PLAY HIM.

WOW! HE MUST WEIGH A TON!

MAKO. WHAT A BRUTE! CONGRADULATIONS MR--?

--REARDON SCOTT REARDON

HEY, WHAT'S THAT IN ITS MOUTH?

EEEEEE!

MY GOD! A BODY!

SCOTT STOOD STARING STUPIDLY AT TED HANSON'S PARTIALLY DIGESTED CORPSE...AT THE DEEP KNIFE MARKS CARVED CRUDELY INTO THE *DEAD MAN'S CHEST* ..AT THE *FIFTEEN MEN* GATHERED AROUND THE SIGHT OF THE GRISLY *MESSAGE*

REARDON DID IT

HE COULD ALMOST *HEAR* THE FAT MAN SINGING DRUNKENLY

THE WELL

OCTOBER 10, 1054

I'M TIRED OF UNPACKING-- HOW ABOUT SOME UNDRESSING?--

BUT WE HAVEN'T FINISHED *UNPACKING* YET!

YOU'RE IMPOSSIBLE!

NO, I'M ***VERY*** POSSIBLE, THAT'S WHAT I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU! GIMME KISS...

MARK, WE DON'T EVEN HAVE THE BED TOGETHER...THE SLATS ARE ALL UNGLUED...

REALLY?... I'M GETTING PRETTY UNGLUED MYSELF...

--NO NEIGHBORS!

IN FRONT OF THE FIRE?

BET YOUR LIFE...

NO WINDOW SHADES...

WILL YOU MAKE THE DRINKS AFTER?

ABSOLUTELY...

YOU'RE ON!

AROOOOOOOO

JESUS! WHAT TH--

I-I HOPE THAT WAS OUTSIDE!... WHATEVER IT WAS..

HAND ME THE FLASHLIGHT, WILL YOU? THIS WON'T TAKE A SECOND, YOU STAY HERE.

ALONE? ARE YOU NUTS?

I'VE GOT SOME KITCHEN MATCHES IN MY SKIRT! HONEY, BE CAREFUL!

BEAM'S KINDA DIM...

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: JOHN BOLTON
Coloring: Steve Oliff Lettering: Ed King

HEAR ANYTHING?

JUST MY KNEES KNOCKING TOGETHER..

MARK, LOOK, THE WELL!

MAYBE SOMETHING'S FALLEN INTO IT... AN ANIMAL OR SOMETHING...

IS THAT GAS I SM—

SH! LISTEN! HEAR THAT? SOMETHING'S.. *HURT*... CRYING OR SOMETHING...

HEY, *WAIT* A MINUTE! WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?

YOU DON'T WANT THE POOR THING TO SUFFER, DO YOU?

THAT DEPENDS ON WHAT THE "POOR THING" IS!

DON'T FRET, I WAS CHAMPION ROPE CLIMBER AT BEARDSLY! WHY DON'T YOU BREW US UP SOME IRISH COFFEES AND STRIKE A SEDUCTIVE POSE IN FRONT OF THE HEARTH?

SERIOUSLY, MARK, DON'T YOU TH NK--

...WE SHOULD THINK ABOUT THIS...

MARK? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

MARK?

JESUS!

HONEY? WHAT IS IT?

INCREDIBLE! THERE'S A-- GOOD LORD!

THERE'S A TUNNEL OF SOME KIND DOWN HERE... RUNNING RIGHT UNDER THE WELL! I CAN HEAR WATER ECHOING--FOR MILES!

CAN YOU SEE THE AN.MAL-- THE ANIMAL THAT MADE THE NO.SE? MARK?

MARK?

HONEY?

MARK? ARE YOU THERE?

MARK? *ANSWER* ME, PLEASE!

MARK?

IT *IS* A TUNNEL! LOOKS LIKE A HOT SPRING!

HONEY? CAN YOU HEAR ME?

ME ME ME ME

MARK? HONEY, I'M FRIGHTENED! PLEASE ANSWER ME! MARK, DON'T TEASE, PLEASE!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE

WHAT'S THAT?!

EEEEEEEEEEEE!!

MARK! MARK, NOOOOO!!

THAT *SOUND*... S-SOMETHING COMING! SOMETHING SPLASHING THROUGH THE WATER TOWARD ME!!...

NOOO! HELP ME! OH, GOD! HELP ME!

THE WELL ROPE!

S-S_IMEY--
C-CAN'T CLIMB FAST ENOUGH (GASP/) CAN'T G-GRIP/...

S-SOMETHING *COMING*, R-RIGHT BEHIND ME... THE *SMELL!*

EE-AGHHHHHHHHH!

...BLACKED OUT... M-MUST HAVE BLACKED OUT...

..HOW LONG? ..OHHHH... HEADS SPINNING...

..T-THAT C-CREATURE...A NIGHTMARE?.. MARK.. IS MARK DEAD?

LIGHT... I CAN SEE DOWN HERE...THE WALLS... LICHEN... PHOSPHORESCENT LICHEN (SNIFF-SNIFF) THAT SMELL... IS IT GAS?..

(GASP!)

OH MY GOD!! (CHOKE!)

M-M-M-MJLCHH-H-H-H...
(CLICK-CLICK)...

SWEET JESUS!... WHAT *IS* IT?

M-MALACH! *LACH!*

GET *AWAY* FROM ME! *NO!*

GET AWAY!

STUNNED ,T/ MY CHANCE TO RUN!!--

CHUNK!

P-PATH UNEVEN...LIKE STEPPING ON--

SLU

SLUCK

WHICH WAY? A HUNDRED CORR DORS/ WHICH WAY?

THAT SOUND.. THAT MEWLING SOUND...

AGHH!

ITS YOUNG... F-FEEDING...FEEDING ON THE (CHOKE) THE D-DEAD...

OH GOD, LET THIS BE A NIGHTMARE...LET THIS JUST BE SOME CRAZY DREAM...

M-MUGGH!

EEEEEEEEEE!

GOT TO (GASP!) FIND THE (GASP!) ROPE!

GOT TO (CHOKE!) FIND THE WELL--

--ROPE!

S-SLIPPERY... CAN'T GET A (GASP!) *GRIP!*

C-CREATURE RIGHT *BEHIND* ME AGAIN! H-HELP ME...GOD, *PLEASE* HELP ME!

HELLO!... HELLO DOWN THERE!

THANK *GOD!* THE *ROPE!* PULL THE ROPE *PLEASE!*

WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU DOIN' DOWN THERE, YOUNG LADY?

HURRY! GET ME UP! HURRY!

WHAT IN GOD'S NAME MADE THAT NOISE?

YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE IT! (GASP!)

GOOD TH NG I SHOWED UP! YOU'D A NEVER GOT OUTTA THERE!

CITY GAS Co

BOOM

CITY GAS Co

GOT A MAJOR GAS LEAK IN THE AREA. SOME FOLKS BEEN COMPLAIN-ING ABOUT IT GETTING IN THEIR WELLS WE'RE CHECKING IT OUT. SAY, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, ANYWAY?

..GAS LEAK... THE TUNNELS... THE ENTIRE NETWORK OF TUNNELS FILLED WITH GAS...

TUNNELS?..

MISS? HEY, WHAT'RE YOU DOIN' WITH THAT MAT--

WAIT! DON'T LIGHT THA--

W-WHERE AM I? C-CAN'T TALK...

WELL! COMING AROUND, ARE WE, AFTER ALL THIS TIME? NO, DON'T TRY TO TALK. YOUR VOCAL CHORDS SEVERELY DAMAGED IN THE EXPLOSION!

HEALING FINE THOUGH, SO DON'T FRET!

THE MAN FROM THE GAS COMPANY GOT OFF A LOT LIGHTER THAN YOU DID, JUST A BROKEN ARM AND A STRAINED BACK.

HE NEVER *COULD* FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU WERE DOING IN THAT WELL OR WHY YOU THREW THE MATCH IN, BUT I GUESS WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL YOU CAN TALK AGAIN TO KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT, WON'T WE?

OH, YES, I ALMOST FORGOT! YOU'LL BE HAPPY TO KNOW THAT BY SOME MIRACLE, THE FETUS YOU'RE CARRYING SURVIVED THE IMPACT OF THE EXPLOSION AND IS GROWING VERY NICELY! BY THE SIZE OF YOU, I'D SAY YOU'LL BE READY TO DELIVER IN ABOUT A MONTH!

F-FETUS? BUT THAT'S *IMPOSSIBLE!* I COULDN'T BE PREGNANT! MARK WAS *STERILE!* I--

...THE *YOUNG!* ...THE CREATURE'S *YOUNG!* FEEDING... FEEDING...

...FEEDING ON THE REMAINS OF THEIR *MOTHER!*

NOW, NOW, MRS. KELLOGG, THERE'S NO NEED TO LOOK SO ALARMED! CHILDBIRTH IS NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF!...

NICK OF TIME

I OPENED THE FRONT DOOR TO MY HOUSE AND FLIPPED UP THE LIGHT SWITCH. NOTHING HAPPENED. I CURSED SOFTLY IN THE DARKNESS AND BEGAN FEELING MY WAY ALONG THE WALL BY THE BOOKCASE. I PAUSED UNCERTAINLY FOR A MOMENT. SOMETHING WAS WRONG; I WAS NOT ALONE IN THE ROOM. I SQUINTED INTO THE GLOOM. SOMEONE.. AND THEN I HEARD THE RASPY CACKLING, SAW THE DULL GLEAM OF A KNIFE BLADE. MY BLOOD TURNED TO ICE. NOW I COULD MAKE OUT THE PALE LIMP FORM OF MY WIFE, HALF-NAKED IN THE CORNER SHADOWS. THE SILVERY BLADE PRESSED TO HER THROAT. I COULD BARELY MAKE OUT HER FACE, BUT I RECOGNIZED THE FAMILIAR UNDERGARMENTS, THE GOLDEN SHEEN OF HER HAIR. AND THOUGH IT HAD BEEN HIDEOUSLY TRANSFORMED SOMEHOW, I ALSO RECOGNIZED THE RASPY BRITISH ACCENT OF THE SHADOWS BEHIND HER ...KENTON'S VOICE...

HEH-HEH!... COME IN, JONATHAN WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.

ANOTHER RASPY CHUCKLE. THE NOW-FAMILIAR GOLF CAP BOBBED INTO VIEW MOMENTARILY IT WAS KENTON ALL RIGHT...

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY WIFE?

SORRY ABOUT THE LIGHTS OLD MAN I KNOW YOU HAVE EYE TROUBLE BUT I COULDN'T VERY WELL TAKE THE CHANCE OF THE NEIGHBORS SEEING THIS, COULD I?

MY SHOE COLLIDED WITH SOMETHING I LOOKED DOWN...

A MILD ***ACID***. IT WAS ALL I HAD IN THE HOUSE. OH, NOT FOR ***HER***, OLD MAN, FOR ***ME***! I ***DRANK*** IT, YOU SEE! DIDN'T ***KILL*** ME THOUGH...JUST...ALTERED THE OLD VOCAL CORDS A BIT!

ACID

TINKLE

STORY: BRUCE JONES **ART: DON LOMAX**
Coloring. Phil Phillipson Lettering. Carrie McCarthy

I *WANTED* TO K LL MYSELF, YOU SEE, WHEN I F.RST *FOUND OUT*, BL.T AS I SA D T D DN'T WORK. JUST AS WELL, TOO; I FOUND I HAD A *MUCH* BETTER DEA. HEH-HEH' *MUCH!*

...FOUND OUT...

ABOJT *YOU* AND *GLORIA!* OH YES I KNOW THE *WHOLE* SORDID STORY, YOU NEEDN'T PROFESS IGNORANCE. MY LOVELY W FE TOLD ME *EVERYTHING!*

WHERE *IS* SHE KENTON?

AREN T YOU AT ALL CONCERNED W TH YOUR *OWN* W FE HERE? HEH-HEH. DON T WORRY, OLD SPORT JEAN S MERELY *UNCONSCIOUS.* A _TTLE DRUG I PERSUADED HER TO D GEST EXACTLY THE SAME DRUG I GAVE TO GLORIA

WHERE *IS* SHE DAMN YOU.'

MY DEAR WIFE? OH SHE'S AT HOME, OLD MAN, A.. SNUG AS A BUG .N HER LITTLE BED. YOU KNOW WHAT BED I MEAN DON T YOU, JONATHAN? --I MEAN YOU *USED* IT OFTEN ENOUGH!

WHAT DO YOU WANT KENTON, *MONEY?*

MONEY? I PREFER TO CA.. T *SENTIMENT.* WHAT I WANT IS MY LOVELY W FES WEDD NG RING--IT'S WORTH QJITE A LOT, OLD MAN... AND YOU'RE GO NG TO *GET* IT FOR ME ..

WEDDING R.NG?

SOMETHING SH FTED N THE GLOOM... KENTON S OTHER SKINNY HAND HOLD NG SOMETH NG...

IT RUNS EXACTLY *TWELVE MINUTES,* JONATHAN ..YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO BRING ME HER R NG N THAT T ME DON'T YOU THINK?

YOU'RE *INSANE*...

PROBABLY, BUT THAT'S HARDLY THE *ISSUE* NOW, IS IT, OLD BOY? THE ISSUE IS YOUR DEAR WIFE'S *NECK* AND HOW I'M GOING TO OPEN IT FOR HER IF YOU'RE NOT BACK BY THE TIME THE LAST GRAIN RUNS OUT...

YOU WOULDN'T...

OH I'D DO *FAR* WORSE THAN THAT, OLD MAN. BY THE WAY YOU STILL CARRY YOUR SATCHEL IN YOUR CAR, DON'T YOU? YOU MAY *NEED* IT! BETTER *HURRY*, JONATHAN-- YOU'VE ALREADY LOST A GOOD TEN SECONDS.

MY EYES RESTED ANOTHER HEARTBEAT ON THE GLEAMING SURFACE OF THE HOURGLASS, THEN I BOLTED BACK THROUGH THE DOOR ..

HOW COULD HE HAVE FOUND OUT? *HOW?* WE WERE SO *CAREFUL!*

I LEAPT INTO MY CAR AND PEELED FROM THE DRIVEWAY. KENTON'S HOME WAS ABOUT FOUR MINUTES FROM MINE..

THIS WHAT I GET FOR INVOLVING MYSELF WITH ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE I WAS A *FOOL*! MORE THE FOOL BECAUSE IT'S *JEAN* I REALLY LOVE, *NOT* GLORIA!

GLORIA...MY GOD, HOW DID IT EVER *BEGIN*?..HOW DID I LET YOU *SEDUCE* ME INTO THIS MADNESS?...

JONATHAN, OLD MAN FANCY SEEING *YOU* HERE. I DON'T BELIEVE YOU'VE MET MY WIFE *GLORIA*, HAVE YOU?

A PLEASURE MRS. KENTON. THIS IS *MY* WIFE, *JEAN!*

HOW DO YOU DO? I'VE SEEN YOU ON *ANOTHER LIFE TO LEAD* ON TELEVISION. YOU'RE A *MARVELOUS* ACTRESS.

WELL, SHALL WE MAKE IT A FOURSOME?

LOOKS LIKE KENTON'S BEEN HIDING MORE THAN JUST A ***BALD HEAD*** UNDER THAT CAP... SHE'S ***LOVELY***... AS IF YOU HADN'T ***NOTICED***..

WHO, ***ME?*** I'M ***FAR*** TOO BLINDED BY YOUR OWN CHARM DARLING.

GLORIA WHAT A SUPP--

WHAT? A ***LUMP?*** WELL-- YES I--EH? WELL I DON'T USUALLY MAKE ***HOUSE CALLS***.. YES I UNDERSTAND YOUR ***CONCERN*** BUT-- OH, VERY WELL, SHALL WE SAY TOMORROW AFTERNOON?

I'M ***SO*** AFRAID I'M GOING TO NEED MORE ***LIGHT*** THAN THIS TO EXAMINE YOU PROPERLY MRS KENTON..

IN THAT CASE DOCTOR I SUPPOSE YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO MOVE ***CLOSER***, WON'T YOU?..

THIS IS ***CRAZY!*** I LOVE ***JEAN!***

AND THAT'S THE LAST THING I WANT TO DO IS HURT HER, JONATHAN WHICH IS WHY WE MUST BE CAREFUL... VERY CAREFUL...

'CAREFUL'... I THOUGHT THAT'S WHAT WE ***HAD*** BEEN! I BRAKED THE CAR IN FRONT OF KENTON'S PLACE AND DASHED UP THE WALK. IT HAD TAKEN JUST OVER FOUR MINUTES..

BLASTED KENTON HAD TAKEN CARE OF THE LIGHTS HERE TOO! I STUMBLED MY WAY TOWARD THE UPSTAIRS BEDROOM...

GLORIA?

GLORIA?...

DEMEROL... SHE'S OUT LIKE A LIGHT! CAN'T SEE IN THE GLOOM BUT SHE DOESN'T APPEAR BEATEN OR CUT

CHRIST! ONLY FIVE MORE MINUTES. WHERE'S THE RING?

NGH! WON'T NGGH!.. COME OFF FINGERS SWOLLEN! RUNNING OUT OF TIME!

HE'LL KILL JEAN IF I DON'T BRING IT BACK! HE SAID HE WOULD.

THE SATCHEL! MY GOD, WHAT WAS THAT HE SAID ABOUT CARRYING MY SATCHEL IN THE CAR?

I FLEW BACK DOWN THE STAIRS IN A DREAM, NOT REALLY BELIEVING WHAT I WAS DOING, WHAT I WAS THINKING OF DOING. I GRABBED MY BAG FROM THE TRUNK AND RACED BACK...

FOUR MINUTES LEFT. HE'LL KILL HER.--HE'LL KILL MY WIFE! IT'S THE ONLY WAY.

(SOB:). F-FORGIVE ME (SOB) GLORIA.

C-CAUTERIZE... G-GOT TO C-CAUTERIZE THE INCISION...

--VERY *NICE*, OLD STICK, AND WITH *THREE* GRAINS TO SPARE! I SUPPOSE YOU'LL BE WANTING *YOUR* WIFE BACK NOW?

GIVE HER TO ME!

OF COURSE, OF COURSE IN A *MOMENT*. THERE'S ONE MORE LITTLE ERRAND I'D LIKE YOU TO RUN, OLD FRIEND. YOU REMEMBER THOSE LOVELY GOLD EARRINGS OF GLORIA'S? THE ONES SHE CLAIMED HER *MOTHER* SENT HER FROM IOWA?

I *WON'T* DO IT...

REALLY? *WONDERFUL!* THEN WE CAN WATCH THE SAND RUN OUT *TOGETHER!* AFTER WHICH WE CAN SEE HOW YOUR BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WIFE LOOKS WITH *TWO MOUTHS!*

I TRIED NOT TO LET MYSELF ENVISION WHAT KIND OF NIGHTMARE KENTON HAD PLANNED FOR ME THIS TIME...

SKREEEE

HEY, YA *DRUNKEN IDIOT!*

THE *BASTARD!* HE KNOWS I CAN HARDLY SEE AT NIGHT, HE *KNOWS* IT! THAT'S WHY HE PLANNED IT THIS WAY!

BUT HOW DID HE FIND OUT ABOUT GLORIA AND ME? WE WERE SO *CAREFUL!*

SHOPPING TOGETHER? JUST YOU AND JEAN? BUT DON'T YOU-- AREN'T YOU--

YOU THINK I *WANTED* TO ACCEPT? SHE *LIKES* ME, JONATHAN. AND WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING TO MAKE THEM SUSPICIOUS-- *EITHER* OF THEM. IN FACT I WANT YOU TO START SPENDING MORE TIME WITH MY *HUSBAND*.

MUST I? IT GIVES ME THE CREEPS.

DARLING, YOU'VE GOT TO *TRUST* ME! I CAN MAKE THIS THING WORK FOR US IF YOU'LL ONLY *TRUST* ME!

TRUST ME! ..YEAH, THAT'S WHAT I DID A... RIGHT! THAT'S WHAT I--

WA-- WHAT'S THAT? RED FLASHING LIGHT...

A COP! DAMN. I-I'VE *GOT* TO STOP...

SKREEE

SPEED'S POSTED AT 35, FELLA; YOU WERE GOING OVER FIFTY...

YES OFFICER... I-I'M SORRY..

BLAST! I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!

MAY I SEE YOUR DRIVER'S LICENSE, PLEASE?

UH, YES. I...

MY *LICENSE*! I LEFT IT IN MY OTHER JACKET. NO

I... IT APPEARS I LEFT IT IN MY OTHER COAT, OFFICER.

UH-HUH ...HOW ABOUT A TITLE AND REGISTRATION TO THAT CAR?

LOOK, I'M A DOCTOR, SEE? I-I'M ON AN EMERGENCY CALL! YOU'RE *DETAINING* ME, OFFICER.

WHY DIDN'T YOU *SAY* SO? I-- GIVE YOU AN *ESCORT*!

I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER *THINKING* IT--ONE INSTANT THE HEAVY BLACK SATCHEL WAS IN MY HAND, THE *NEXT*...

THERE ISN'T *TIME*, DAMN YOU!

I PEELED AWAY FROM THE CURB WITHOUT LOOKING BACK...BUT IT WAS A LONG WAY YET TO KENTON'S HOUSE...

IT'S HIM--THE COP! HE'S ON MY TAIL AGAIN

SKREEEE

GOT TO LOSE HIM--CAN'T LET HIM SEE WHERE I'M GOING!

GOT TO SHAKE HIM QUICK! RUNNING OUT OF TIME!

OH MY GOD!

BUS!

SKREEEE

SMASH

AT THE KENTON HOUSE, I RACED UP THE STAIRS TO THE BEDROOM AGAIN, BLOOD THUNDERING IN MY EARS..

GOD HELP ME...

WELDED TOGETHER --HE'S WELDED THE EARRINGS HALVES TOGETHER! SWEET JESUS...

I DON'T KNOW HIS FATE...I KNEW THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO... THERE WASN'T EVEN ENOUGH TIME TO THINK...

DEAR GOD, I'M BUTCHERING HER BIT BY BIT

I CLUTCHED THE BANNISTER DIZZILY ON THE WAY DOWN...THE STARS SWAM BENEATH ME...

...ONLY THREE MINUTES LEFT...

EXCELLENT HEH-HEH! ALMOST DONE NOW! ONE LAST TRIP AND YOUR WIFE IS FREE, SCOUT'S HONOR

FORGET IT KENTON I'M THROUGH! I QUIT! I'M NOT GOING TO DISFIGURE THAT WOMAN FURTHER I'M CALLING THE POLICE.

YOU DO THAT OLD SPORT BUT BEFORE YOU DO I'D APPRECIATE YOUR FETCHING MY DARLING WIFE'S MOST PRIZED POSSESSION THAT INCESSANTLY WAGGING INSTRUMENT THAT BROUGHT ALL OF US TO THE MOMENT AT HAND

DEAR GOD..

YOU SEE I DON'T WANT TO KILL HER, OLD MAN I JUST DON'T WANT HER EVER TALKING ABOUT YOUR FILTHY LITTLE TRYST AGAIN!

LET GO OF HER, KENTON, NOW, BEFORE I KILL YOU WITH YOUR OWN GUN! LET GO OF MY WIFE!

NICE TRY, OLD SPORT. BUT I *NEVER* KEEP THAT GUN LOADED, NOR ANY SHELLS IN THE HOUSE AND BESIDES, JONATHAN OLD FRIEND, WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THIS IS YOUR WIFE?

NO!

OH MY GOD JEAN! JEAN! WHAT HAVE I DONE TO YOU!

BETTER HURRY, OLD STICK.. *HEH-HEH!*) YOU REALLY SHOULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT TERRIBLE *EYESIGHT* OF YOURS.

I GOT THERE IN *TWO MINUTES FLAT*... BUT NOT BEFORE THE *POLICE*..

JEAN! JEAN!

YOU *KNOW* THIS GUY WISTER?

(GASP) KENTON!

BEEN DEAD ABOUT *THIRTY MINUTES*... LOOKS LIKE SOMEBODY ATTACKED HIM WITH A--

HEY! WHAT'S THAT IN YOUR *HAND?*

GRAB HIM!

IS HE *REALLY* GONE NOW, GLORIA? IS IT *OVER?*

HE'S GONE, DARLING, AND I CALLED THE POLICE RIGHT AFTER HE LEFT.

YOU DID BEAUTIFULLY! THAT WAS THE PERFORMANCE OF A *LIFETIME!*

AND THE *SCALPEL?*

I COATED IT WITH STRYCHNINE.. MY DEAR HUSBAND'S *LONG* GONE BY NOW. SEE, BABY, LIKE I TOLD YOU BEFORE, YOU'VE GOT TO *TRUST* ME... I CAN MAKE THIS THING *WORK* FOR US IF YOU'LL ONLY *TRUST* ME!

THE SECRET PLACE

SOMEONE ONCE SAID THAT A CHILD'S CAPACITY FOR LOVE IS EQUALED ONLY BY HIS ABILITY TO HATE. HAVING BEEN ON THIS PLANET FOR ONLY A SCANT TEN YEARS, YOU DO NOT FULLY COMPREHEND THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THESE WORDS, BUT YOU ARE ACUTELY AWARE OF THE REPERCUSSIONS RESULTING FROM THEIR PRACTICE, ESPECIALLY THE ABILITY TO HATE. HATING AND FEARING HAVE MADE YOU THE WAY YOU ARE TODAY. YOUR NAME IS JOHNNY WATKINS... YOU HAVE BEEN MUTE SINCE THE AGE OF SIX...
BRUCE JONES

STORY AND ART: BRUCE JONES
Coloring: Joe Chiodo Lettering: Carrie McCarthy

CAMP PINE
CAMP PINEY
YOUR MOTHER'S IDEA OF EXPRESSING LOVE IS TO SEND YOU TO CAMP PINEY FOR THE SUMMER TO GET YOU OUT FROM UNDER FOOT. YOUR MOTHER IS DIVORCED...

THOUGH UNAWARE OF IT, SHE IS THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF YOUR MUTENESS, WHICH THE DOCTORS CALL *PSYCHOSOMATIC*. CAMP, SHE FEELS, WILL HELP CURE YOU. YOU DO NOT AGREE. YOU HATE CAMP. YOU HATE OTHER CHILDREN. YOU HATE YOURSELF...

CAMP PINE
CAMP PINEY

YOUR MOTHER INTRODUCES YOU TO MR. MATHEWS, THE COUNSELOR SHE TELLS HIM ABOUT YOUR *SPECIAL PROBLEM*.

CAMP PINEY

MR. MATHEWS SMILES AND GENTLY PUNCHES YOUR ARM AND SAYS YOU WILL GET ALONG FINE... YOU HATE HIM IMMEDIATELY...

AND LATER, WHEN SHE HAS LEFT, YOU STAND INSIDE YOUR CABIN AND WATCH THE OTHER BOYS PLAY BASEBALL AND WONDER WHY YOU ARE SO OUT OF PLACE IN THIS WORLD AND IF THERE IS A PLACE, A *SECRET PLACE*, FOR YOU...

THAT NIGHT WHILE THE OTHERS SLEEP, YOU SIT UP ON YOUR BUNK AND TRY TO FIND THAT *SECRET PLACE* IN THE VOLUMES OF BOOKS YOU BROUGHT WITH YOU FROM HOME. YOU READ A GREAT DEAL, AND IT IS ALWAYS THE SAME KIND OF BOOK... GHOST STORIES, TALES OF HORROR.

IN THE CREATURES OTHERS SHUN AND FEAR YOU FIND SOME SMALL COMFORT... SOME VAGUE IDENTITY...

MR. MATHEWS DOES NOT OBJECT TO YOUR READING EVEN IN THE DAYTIME. HE SIMPLY SMILES AND LETS YOU BE. YOU DO NOT KNOW IT YET, BUT YOU WANT VERY MUCH FOR HIM TO LIKE YOU...

THERE IS A RITUAL AT CAMP PINEY...IT MAINTAINS THAT ALL ITS MEMBERS WEAR CUT-OFF JEANS AND CAMP PINEY T-SHIRTS...

...ALL, THAT IS EXCEPT THE OLDEST BOY--HE WEARS WHAT HE PLEASES... AND ONLY HE!

ANYONE OPPOSING THIS LAW, WILFULLY OR NOT, MUST UNDERGO PUNISHMENT FROM THE ONE IN CHARGE...

TO THE OTHER BOYS T S HARMLESS FUN .TO A BOY LKE YOJ, JNABLE TO PROTEST VERBALLY, IT S A SEVERE TRAJMA...

THE COOL LAKE WATERS DO NOT CURB THE SEETHING HATRED RISING WITHIN YOU...THEY ONLY FAN IT HIGHER...

UNTIL EVERY THOUGHT IS BLOCKED FROM YOUR MIND...SAVE THE DESIRE TO DESTROY!

YOU HAD SEEN THE RIFLE IN MR. MATHEWS' CABIN THE F RST DAY YOU ARRIVED. EVEN THEN PLANS WERE FORM NG...

BJT, TEMPORARILY AT LEAST, THEY WILL HAVE TO BE DELAYED...THE OWNER IS RETURNING...

THE THOUGHT OF MR. MATHEWS CATCHING YOU IS UNBEARABLE. THERE S ONLY ONE TH NG TO DO..

YOU RUN BLINDLY INTO THE FOREST... YOU RUN UNTIL YOUR LEGS REFUSE TO WORK...THEN YOU FALL FORWARD ON THE SOFT EARTH...

WHEN YOU OPEN YOUR EYES AGAIN, AN UNBELIEVING GASP ESCAPES YOUR THROAT...

YOU'VE NEVER SEEN ANY PLACE LIKE IT! QUICKLY YOU HIDE THE GUN UNDER A BUSH...

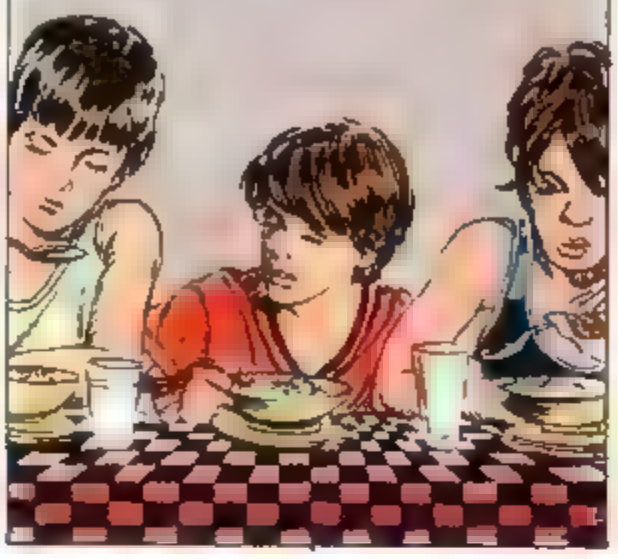
YOU'VE FOUND IT! YOUR SECRET PLACE!

HOW QUICKLY HOPES CAN VANISH. THE THING RISING FROM THE LAKE IS MORE LOATHSOME THAN ALL YOUR STORYBOOK MONSTERS...

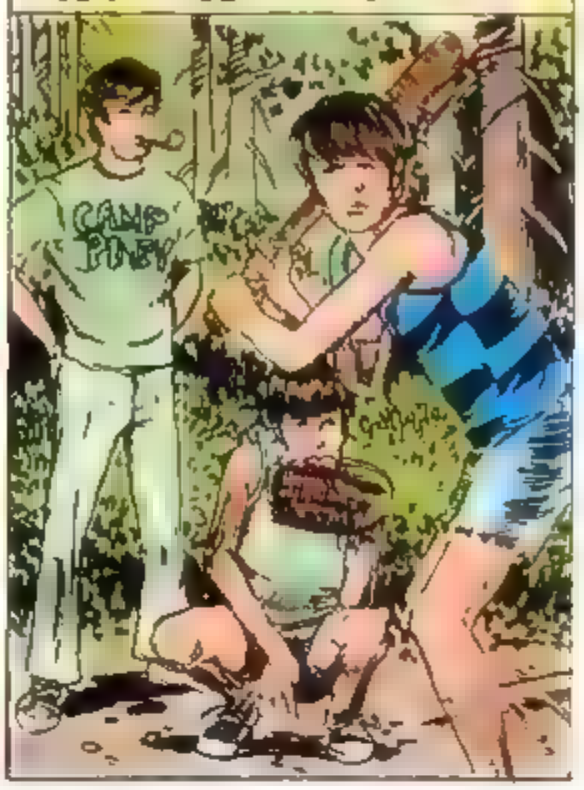
YOU SCREAM AND FLEE--BUT NOT BEFORE THE THING HAS SPOKEN... NOT BEFORE YOU HEAR THE WORD "FRIEND".

"FRIEND". YOU HAVE NOT HEARD THE WORD OFTEN ENOUGH IN YOUR YOUNG LFE. YOU RETURN TO CAMP BUT DO NOT SLEEP...

"FRIEND". ANYONE ELSE WOULD HAVE REPORTED THE CREATURE, ANYONE ELSE WOULD HAVE HAD IT DESTROYED... ANYONE ELSE WOULD NOT NEED A FRIEND AS YOU DO. YOU SIT AT THE BREAKFAST TABLE THE NEXT MORNING AND FEEL THE ELBOWS AGAINST YOU AND KNOW YOU WILL NOT TRY TO EXPLAIN THE CREATURE TO THESE BOYS... YOU CAN ALREADY HEAR THE LAUGHTER...



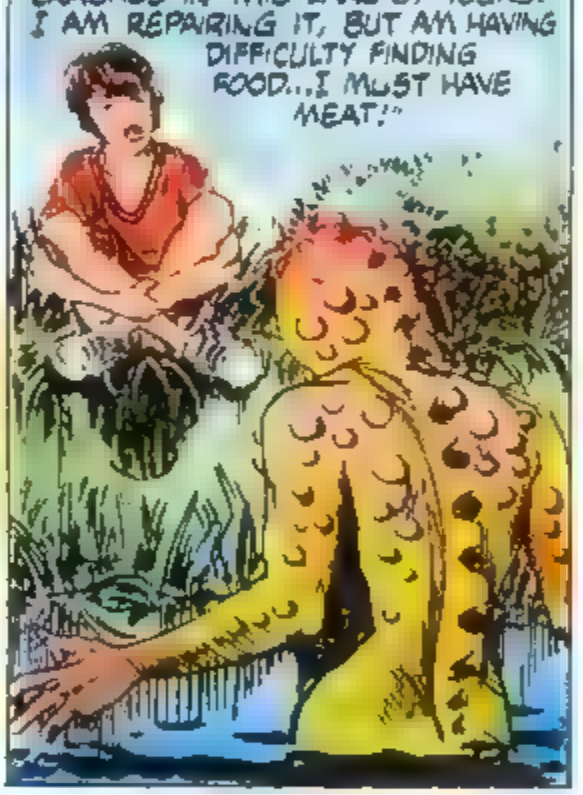
MR. MATHEWS? NO. HE WOULD NOT LAUGH PERHAPS, BUT YOU DON'T TRUST HIM FULLY YET...



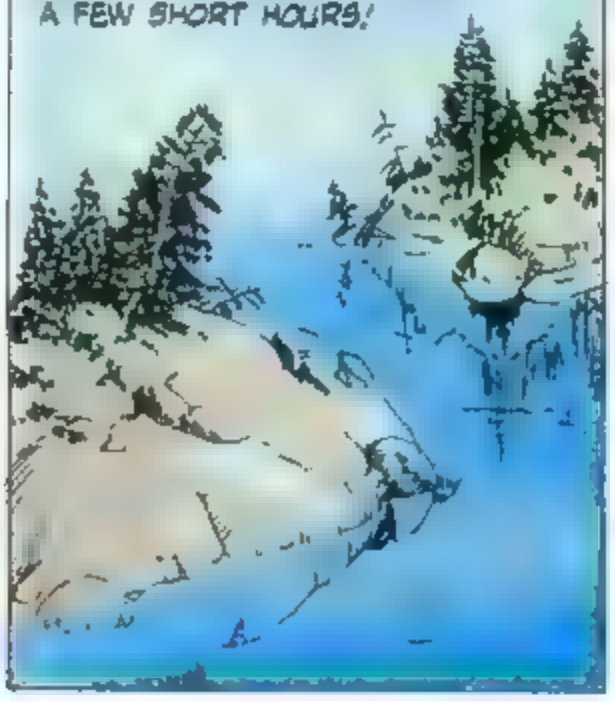
"FRIEND". THE WORD WILL NOT LEAVE YOU ALONE. YOU GO BACK, CAUTIOUSLY, CAREFULLY...

THE THING DOES NOT CHASE YOU... IT MOTIONS TO YOU ...BECKONS... YOUR LEGS ARE TREMBLING, BUT YOU COME...

"I WILL NOT HARM YOU", IT SAYS. "I COME FROM THE STARS... MY SHIP CRASHED IN THIS LAKE OF YOURS. I AM REPAIRING IT, BUT AM HAVING DIFFICULTY FINDING FOOD... I MUST HAVE MEAT!"



ALL DAY LONG YOU SIT AND LISTEN TO THE CREATURE. IT TELLS YOU OF THE PLANETS AND THE GALAXY AND THE UNIVERSE... STORIES RIGHT OUT OF YOUR PICTURE BOOKS. A SECRET PLACE AND A SECRET FRIEND ALL IN A FEW SHORT HOURS!



BUT THAT EVENING MR MATHEWS COMES INTO YOUR CABIN AND HIS FACE IS GRAVE AS HE ADDRESSES YOU...

ONE OF THE BOYS SEEMS TO HAVE DISAPPEARED, HE EXPLAINS. HE WAS LAST SEEN ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE LAKE. YOU SWALLOW AS HE NAMES ONE OF THE BOYS WHO WAS TEASING YOU...

AT THE PERPHERY OF YOUR MIND A TERRIBLE THOUGHT IS FORMING. WHEN THE OTHERS AREN'T LOOKING, YOU SNEAK AWAY.

YOU SEARCH THE BANK SURROUNDING THE SECRET PLACE OVER AND OVER, BUT THE CREATURE IS NOWHERE...

RETURNING TO CAMP, YOU FIND MR. MATHEWS AND A POLICEMAN... WITH THE BODY OF THE MISSING BOY!

YOU DON'T WANT TO ACCEPT WHAT YOUR CONSCIENCE INSISTS IS TRUE-- THAT THE CREATURE WAS A PRODUCT OF YOUR VIVID IMAGINATION AND STORY BOOK ADVENTURES. THAT THE BODY BENEATH THE BLANKET IS YOUR OWN DOING YOUR OWN *REVENGE!*

STILL YOU FIGHT THE HORRENDOUS THOUGHT--YOU RUSH BACK THE NEXT MORNING AND FIND...

YOUR SCREAM ECHOES AROUND THE LAKE. THE THING STANDS OVER THE STILL, PROSTRATE FORM --OF THE BOY WHO PUSHED YOU IN THE LAKE!

YOU STUMBLE BACKWARD, YOUR FOOT COLLIDING WITH SOMETHING. YOU PICK UP THE RIFLE...

BLAM!

DID YOU KILL IT? IS IT GONE? WAS IT EVER THERE AT ALL?

FANTASY OR REALITY? YOUR MIND CAN NO LONGER COPE WITH IT ALONE HEAD SPINNING, YOU RUSH BACK TO MR. MATHEWS' CABIN. YOU'VE GOT TO TELL *SOMEONE!* MR. MATHEWS APPEARS TO BE SLEEPING AS YOU RUN INTO HIS ROOM. YOU GRAB HIS SHOULDERS AND SHAKE HIM.. GESTURING WILDLY...

IF ONLY YOU COULD SPEAK! BUT YOU MUST MAKE HIM UNDERSTAND...YOU MUST MAKE HIM FOLLOW YOU BACK TO THE *SECRET PLACE!* YOU TAKE HIS ARM AND PULL HIM TO THE DOOR. WHY DOES HE LOOK AT YOU THAT WAY? WHY IS HE SLEEPING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY?

WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY YOU DRAG HIM TO THE SECRET PLACE. BUT IT IS DESERTED...THERE IS NO *BODY*, NO *CREATURE*...

MR MATHEWS STARES AT YOU "I HAD A LITTLE BOY ONCE," HE IS SAYING. "HE WOULD HAVE BEEN ABOUT YOUR AGE BY NOW. HE DIED AT BIRTH YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND...

CRAMP PINEY

"HE DIED AND TOOK MY WIFE WITH HIM...MY LOVELY YOUNG WIFE, WHO I LOVED ABOVE ALL THINGS ON THIS EARTH. SHE WOULD STILL BE ALIVE IF IT WEREN'T FOR HIM!"

WE HAD BEEN SO HAPPY UNTIL THE CHILD! THE WORLD SHOULD BE HAPPY WITHOUT CHILDREN! ALL CHILDREN.

I DIDN'T WANT TO KILL THE OTHERS. BUT I HAD TO FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

BRIGHT SPOTS ARE DANCING BEFORE YOUR EYES WHEN HIS FINGERS SUDDENLY LEAVE YOUR THROAT. MR MATHEWS SCREAMS AS SOMETHING DRAGS HIM INTO THE LAKE..

THEN ALL IS QUIET. AFTER A MOMENT YOU ARE STARING IN AWE AT THE LARGE SILVER SPHERE RISING ABOVE THE QUIET WATER...

AND AS IT SOARS INTO THE SKY AND VANISHES AT LAST IN THE CLOUDS, YOU NOW UNDERSTAND.. YOUR THROAT MOVES AND YOU UTTER YOUR FIRST WORDS IN FOUR YEARS...

...GOOD-BYE... MY FRIEND...

THE End

TERMINATED

SCRIPT: BRUCE JONES ART AND LETTERING: RICHARD CORBEN
Coloring Joe Chiodo

THERE HE *IS!*

CREEEEAK!

--M-MGGH (GURGLE)...

AGGHH!

LOOK AT HIM! H-HE'S ALL ROTTED AWAY!

DON'T TOUCH HIM.

CHASE HIM OUTTA TOWN! DRIVE THE LEPER OFF!

GIT! GO 'WAY LEPER!

GIT OUTTA OUR TOWN. GO ROT SOMEWHERES ELSE!

I'LL FIX 'IM!

KER-BLAM!

GOT 'IM!

WE DONE IT!

WE SHOWED HIM!

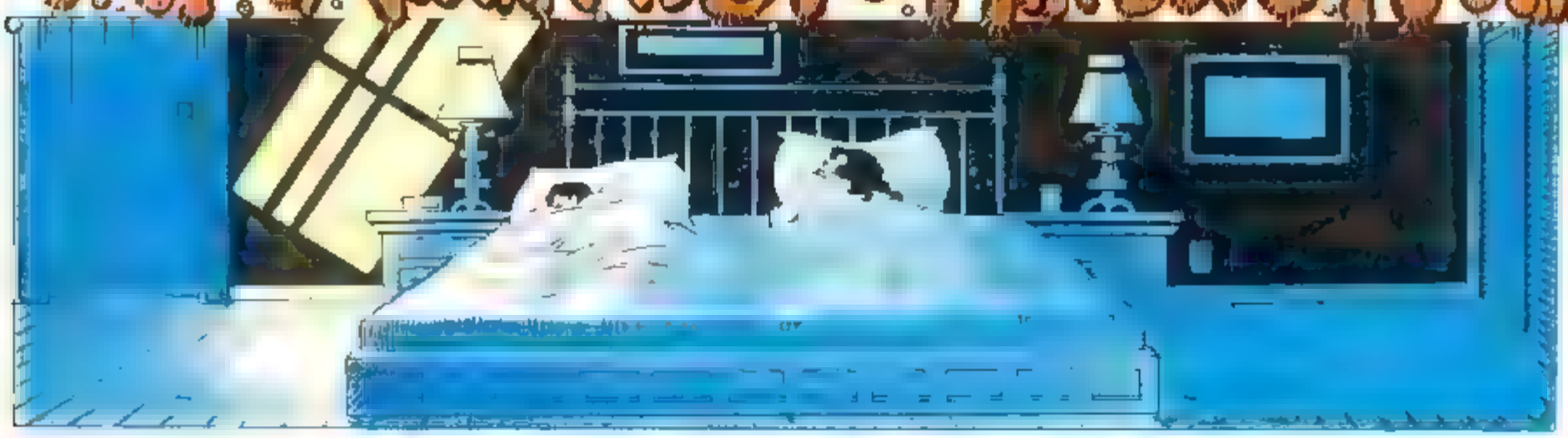
WE GOT THAT OL' LEPER!

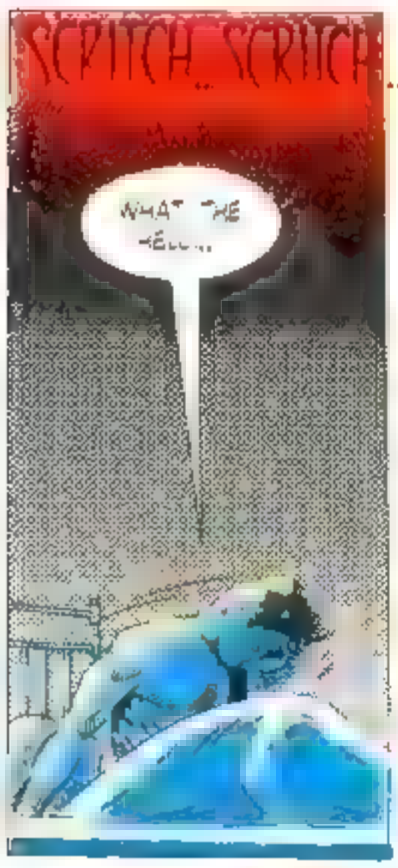
DON'T NEED HIS KIND IN THESE PARTS!

HAWKINS JUNCTION IS A NICE *CLEAN* TOWN!

HAWKINS JUNCTION WATER SUPPLY

SCRITCH SCRITCH SCRITCH...





SCRIPT: BRUCE JONES ART AND COLORING: BILL WRAY
Lettering Carrie McCarthy

MOUSE?

DAMN BIG *MOUSE*. SOUNDS MORE LIKE A *RAT*. I'M GOING TO SEE..

SCRITCH...SCRITCH...

...NEVER GET ANY SLEEP WITH ALL THAT RACKET

HMPH! STOPPED

YAWN! WHERE MUSTER KILL MIGHTY RODENT?

I THINK I BROKE INTO THE KITCHEN SMELLED YOUR LASAGNE AND DIED.

OH YOU'RE FUNNY

SCRITCH...SCRITCH...

HONEY REALLY

I CAN'T *HELP* IT, I CAN'T *SLEEP* WITH THAT THING IN THE HOUSE!

NOT IN THE KITCHEN

SCRITCH...SCRITCH

THE DEN?

BUMP

CRASH!

HUH?

R OH, WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU *DOING?*

HES *HERE!* ..TTLE BUGGERS *IN*-HERE, I CAN *HEAR* H M

HONEY DAWN T.. BE *DAWN* SOON LOOK FOR T N THE *MORNING!*

..CANT..CANT HEAR IT NOW.

YOU TOLD ME *LATH* WEEK MATH THE EVAL, THT CHRTH

DID I?

YETH!

WELL *SOME* GOLD NUGS ARE TR ER THAN OTHERS

BY THE WAY YOU LOOK LIKE *DEATH* WARMED OVER TODAY; TOOTH HURTING YOU?

I'M BEING *HAUNTED* BY INVISIBLE VERMIN

TRY A MOUSE TRAP AND SEND THAT BEAUTFUL W FE OF YOURS N NEXT WEEK SO I CAN MOLEST HER WH E YOURE AT WORK

RAT TRAPS?

CHRIS' IDEA I'M GOING TO GET THAT SLIMY LITTLE CHEESE EATER ONCE AND FOR ALL

SCRITCH...SCRITCH

I DON'T BELIEVE THIS

HASN'T EVEN TOUCHED THEM

SHATTER!

SSSSSSSS

RUN YOU MANIAC!

IT'S UNCANNY, I TELL YOU! I'VE SEARCHED EVERY INCH OF THE PLACE

BUT I CAN HEAR HIM IMAGINE I CAN HEAR THE LITTLE CREEP

AND JUST AS I DROP OFF SCRITCH SCRITCH SCRITCH THERE HE GOES AGAIN DRIVING ME NUTS!

AND HE'S DRIVING ME NUTS

I TOLD YOU HE WAS THE EXCITABLE TYPE, I'M SURE DEAR YOU SHOULD HAVE HEEDED ME

AND SLEEPING SOUNDLY HERE JUST SNORES THROUGH IT

HA! THAT SCRUFF WHO COULD SLEEP WITH A BULLDOZER CHARGING THROUGH THE HOUSE AT 3 A.M.?

POOR LITTLE MAPS- HAS DON'T YOU JUST ASK YOUR BRAINY BEATNIK FRIEND FOR THE SOLUTION?

A CAT! CHRIS, YOU'RE BRILLIANT!

I BELIEVE I ALREADY SAID THAT DON'T I?

YOU SEE MY DARLING HE'S NOT *NEARLY* GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU. MARRY *ME* AND LEAVE THIS *RAT CHASING WRETCH* TO FLOUNDER ABOUT IN THE SUBURBAN WASTES.

OKAY TIGER GO GET 'EM!

LORD I HOPE THIS *WORKS!*

SCRITCH... SCRITCH...

GOOD-FOR-NOTHING DAMN CAT AND I FALL OVER--

JESUS CHRIST!

BUT IT'S *IMPOSSIBLE!* THERE MUST BE A HOLE IN THE ATTIC--ANOTHER CAT MUST HAVE GOTTEN IN WHEN THEY HAD A FIGHT

NO CAT COULD DO THAT MARGE

SCRITCH... SCRITCH... SCRITCH...

LISTEN! I HEAR IT? I *HEAR* IT?

RICK? HONEY I'M HOME

Food Shack

RICK! OH DEAR GOD!

(HEH!-HEH!) . . IN THE WALL . . HE'S IN THE WALL

CRACK!

CRASH!

(HEH!-HEH!) I'M GETTING CLOSER

WAM!

(HEH! HEH!) I'LL GET THE LITTLE RASCAL

WRENCH!

HONEY. COME AWAY

DON'T TOUCH ME!

GOT TO FIND HIM. HEH. YES GOT TO FIND HIM

WAM!

SCRITCH...

STOP IT!

SCRITCH...

STOP IT!

SCRITCH

STOP IT!

SCRITCH

...S DE MY--

SCRITCH

HEAD

WHAM!

SCRITCH

OH GOD! INSIDE MY

WHAM!

HEAD!

EEEEEEEEAAA!

CHRIS CHRIS!

SLAM!

HURRY!

...AGGS E WHAT A THE HE...

R-R-R?

!--OH GOD NO!

HOLY--HES DEAD!

--S-SMASHED H S HEAD OPEN ...KE HE WAS TRY NG TO GET AT H S BRAIN

(SOB) ...S DE MY HEAD HE SA D SOB-SOB)

. OVERWORKED (SOB)...HE WAS OVERWORKED! I (SOB) TOLD HIM...

YOU ...E DOWN N HERE, HONEY I... CALL THE AMBULANCE

OUT OF ORDER OR SOMETH NG I...L TRY NEXT DOOR AT MY HOUSE. YOU ...E ST... NOW

SOB SOB

SCRITCH SCRITCH

CLICK!

SCRITCH SCRI

1 HOLLOW OUT TOOTH

2 PUT IN M.NI-MIKE

3 PUT ON FALSE CROWN

SSSSS CRAK!

AND WE WON'T BE NEED'N YOU ANY MORE MY FRIEND TIME FOR YOU TO GO THE WAY OF THE CAT

SQUEEE

HELLO?

YEAH IT'S *ME* CHRIS JUST WANTED TO SEE IF YOUR *PHONE* WAS WORKING AGAIN. I CALLED THE POLICE HARGE

THANKS CHRIS.

LISTEN I'VE BEEN THINKING I DON'T THINK YOU'D BETTER SLEEP OVER THERE ALL ALONE TONIGHT AFTER WHAT'S HAPPENED. I INSIST YOU STAY *HERE* WITH ME.

I ONLY HAVE *ONE* BED OF COURSE BUT

MAJORITY of ONE

YOU SHRIEK YOUR HOWL OF PAIN TO THE BRIGHT, FULL MOON ABOVE YOU AS THE 30-30 SLUG WITH THE SILVER NITRATE COATING TEARS INTO YOUR SHOULDER, SHOWERING THE ROCKY TERRAIN WITH BRIGHT BLOOD AND BITS OF SHIRT AND FLESH AND FUR. YOU GRASP THE TORN, BLEEDING WOUND AND STUMBLE FORWARD ACROSS THE PATH OF TUMBLED STONES BEFORE YOU, YOUR KNEES DIGGING AGONIZINGLY INTO THE ROUGH GRAVEL. A QUICK, RAGGED BREATH, A FRACTIONAL RESPITE FROM THE MEN AND DOGS PURSUING YOU, AND THEN YOU'RE UP AND RUNNING AGAIN... RUNNING, RUNNING, ALWAYS RUNNING AS THE BAYING OF THE HOUNDS BEHIND YOU ECHOES ACROSS THE DRY CANYON AND THE EXCITED SHOUTS OF THE HUNTERS DRAW EVER CLOSER...EVER CLOSER...

THE DRY EMPTY CANYON GIVES WAY TO SPARSE THEN THICKLY GROWING VEGETATION AS YOU RUN ON. SOON A FIR TREE OR TWO APPEAR. .AND THEN LOOMING OUT OF THE NIGHT, THE TANGLED WALL OF VEGETATION THAT IS THE FORTRESS OF SANCTITY YOU HAVE BEEN SEEKING ..

SCRIPT: BRUCE JONES ART. VAL MAYERIK
Lettering Carrie McCarthy Coloring Joe Ch odo

YOU PLUNGE HEADLONG INTO THE DENSE UNDERGROWTH, DODGING AND WEAVING AND PRAYING TO WHATEVER GOD PROTECTS CREATURES LIKE YOU THAT WHIZZING BULLETS WON'T FIND THEIR MARK..

ZZING!

PEEOWW!

A SUDDEN SHARP SENSATION JOLTS THROUGH YOUR LEFT LEG...

WHA--?

A "SENSATION"...BUT LITTLE MORE THERE IS NO PAIN FROM THE BITING METAL TEETH, NOR DO THEY INFLICT INJURY. THE DEADLY SILVER BULLETS ARE YOUR ONLY REAL ENEMY...

FOOLS! DON'T THEY EVER LEARN?

THE BEAR TRAP HAS COST YOU PRECIOUS TIME AND PERHAPS THAT WAS ITS PURPOSE. YOU CAN NO LONGER HOPE TO OUTDISTANCE YOUR PURSUERS THROUGH SHEER STRENGTH... IF YOU ARE TO SURVIVE THIS NIGHT IT WILL BE BY YOUR WITS...

HUH--?

DOWN..DOWN...OVER AND OVER. THE NIGHT BECOMES A WHIRLWIND OF CLAY AND SKY CLAY AND SKY, CLAY AND SKY...

YOU TURN ABOUT ONCE MORE, SEEKING A NEW DIRECTION--ANY DIRECTION--AND SUDDENLY YOUR PAWED FEET ARE TREADING EMPTY AIR...

...THEN SILENCE, SAVE FOR THE DISTANT BAYING OF THE HOUNDS...

YOU LIFT YOUR HEAD WEAR_Y... *GET UP! GET UP! THEY'RE COMING!* YOUR EYES FOCUS TIRED_Y...

WHA-WHAT _S IT? A C-CAVE?

IT MIGHT BE A DEATH TRAP. IT MIGHT BE THE WORST THING YOU COULD DO. BUT CHANCES ARE THE HOUNDS HAVE LOST YOUR SCENT IN THE FALL...

...AND EVEN IF THEY HAVEN'T THE MEN PROBABLY LACK THE COURAGE TO MAKE THE C_MB DOWN ..THE CLIFF MAY HAVE SAVED YOUR _IFE...

"SAFE" ..THE WORD SOUNDS TOO GOOD TO BE REA_... "SAFE"...YOU'RE SAFE AGAIN FOR ANOTHER NIGHT...

GROWLLFF!

R-R-RR-R!

THE STRUGGLE S BRIEF. EVEN THE LARGEST BEAR IS HARDLY A MATCH FOR YOUR NCRED BLE, SUPERNORMAL STRENGTH. YOU STEP BACK, APPRAISING YOUR WORK, AS THE SOUND OF THE HOUNDS FADES AWAY IN THE DISTANCE.

YOU STAY IN THE CAVE FOR SEVERAL HOURS... UNTIL SOMETHING, AT LAST DR VES YOL OUT...

THE SMELL OF FOOD...

YOL STEP ACROSS A MOSS-COVERED LOG AND COME LPON THE L TTLE CLEARING, THE LITTLE TAR PAPER SHACK. THE WOMAN IS PLLLING WATER FROM THE OLD STONE WELL...

SHE...(CHOKE) ...SHE S LOVELY...

...ABSOLLTELY LOVELY...

...LOVELY...

W-WHO S THERE?

SCRAPE!

W-WHO S IT?...

COME N. I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU...

I...I'VE LOST MY WAY... I WONDER IF YOU--

EXPECTING? THEN ...YOU KNOW...

IT'S BEEN ON THE RADIO FOR WEEKS. YOU'RE THE LAST ONE, YOU KNOW, THE LAST ONE LEFT. WOULD YOU LIKE SOME COFFEE?

YOU AREN'T AFRAID?

WOULD IT DO ME ANY GOOD? I KNEW YOU'D TURN UP SOONER OR LATER AND I CAN HARDLY KEEP YOU OUT CAN I? YES, I'M AFRAID. CREAM AND SUGAR?

YOU'RE ALONE?

I HAVE A CHILD, AMY, IN THE NEXT ROOM. HOW DID YOU STAY ALIVE SO LONG? THE OTHERS WERE WIPED OUT LONG AGO.

I GUESS I'M A SURVIVOR. WHAT ABOUT YOU? ARE YOU A SURVIVOR, MISS--?

NO NAMES, PLEASE.

WHY?

BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LIVE VERY LONG AND I DON'T WANT TO REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE MAN WHO MADE LOVE TO ME AND THEN DIED. WOULD YOU LIKE SOME LEFTOVER POT ROAST?

ARE WE?

GOING TO MAKE LOVE?

ARE WE WHAT?

DON'T YOU WANT TO?

YES. DO YOU?

MOMMY?

GO TO SLEEP, AMY DARLING, IT'S ALL RIGHT...

MY GOD..

HAVE THEY COME TO GET ME, MOMMY?

GO TO SLEEP, BABY, HE'S A FRIEND. NO ONE WILL HURT YOU. SH-H...

YOUR HUSBAND?

AND THEY KNOW NOTHING ABOUT--

THEY SHOT HIM FOUR MONTHS AGO. AMY AND I WERE HIDING IN THE CELLAR.

THEY'RE WATCHING THE HOUSE, I'M SURE. BUT SO FAR WE'VE BEEN LUCKY WOULD YOU LIKE SOME RICE?

BEFORE THE WAR, MY HUSBAND WAS A VERY IMPORTANT MAN, A GENERAL. THEN ONE DAY WE OPENED THE DOOR AND HIS OWN MEN WALKED IN AND SHOT HIM. FUNNY HOW QUICKLY PEOPLE FORGET ONCE YOU'RE NO LONGER... ONE OF THE MAJORITY...

I'M SORRY...

ONE OF HIS OWN FAMILY BETRAYED HIM--IN EXCHANGE FOR A LIFE. DO YOU THINK THAT'S TERRIBLE, MR -- WHATEVER YOUR NAME IS?

I DON'T KNOW...I MIGHT DO THE SAME IN A SIMILAR SITUATION...

YOU KNOW THE SAD PART? THEY SHOT HIM BECAUSE HE WASN'T ***PURE***. NOT BECAUSE HE WAS HAIRY PART OF THE TIME OR GOOD OR BAD OR INDIFFERENT. BUT BECAUSE HE WASN'T ***CONSISTANT!*** BECAUSE HE ***CHANGED*** WITHOUT WARNING...WAS ***IMPURE***...

THAT'S WHY THEY'RE GOING TO KILL YOU...BECAUSE YOU'RE ONLY LIKE THEM ***PART*** OF THE TIME... AND THEY CAN'T STAND THAT...THEY CAN'T TOLERATE THAT...IT'S LIKE BEING ***BLACK*** PART OF THE TIME...OR CHICANO...OR--

SH-H...

CRASH!

YOU...SET ME UP, DIDN'T YOU? YOU DETAINED ME ON PURPOSE! YOU'RE THEIR JUDAS GOAT, AREN'T YOU? AREN'T YOU?

SO YOU'RE THE FAMILY MEMBER... YOU'RE THE BETRAYER.

BLAM!

BLAM!

BLAM!

... MPURE...

MY BABY...YOU PROMISED TO SPARE MY BABY IF I TOLD...YOU PROMISED TO TAKE CARE OF MY BABY..

BLAM!

MOMMY? WHAT WAS THAT NOISE? MOMMY?

BLAM

YOU CLIMB INTO YOUR TRUCK AND HANG THE GUN IN ITS RACK. YOU PULL AWAY FROM THE LITTLE TAR PAPER SHACK AND TRY NOT TO LOOK BACK...

YOU DON'T LET YOURSELF THINK ABOUT THE WAR AND THE PLAGUE AND THE WAY THINGS USED TO BE AND WHO HAS A *RIGHT* TO LIVE AND WHO HASN'T... IT ISN'T YOUR DECISION...

1749
PAUL NIL

ALL THAT MATTERS IS THAT THE WAR IS OVER, THE LAST ONE IS DEAD, THE WORLD CAN BE *NORMAL* AGAIN... THINGS CAN GET BACK TO ROUTINE... THE STRONG HAVE SURVIVED...

YOU CLIMB OUT OF YOUR TRUCK AND WALK TOWARD THE FRONT PORCH OF YOUR HOUSE WHERE YOUR WIFE AND DAUGHTER ARE STANDING AND SMILING AND WAVING AND WELCOMING THE VICTOR HOME...

Banjo Lessons

I DON'T *KNOW* WHY IT HAPPENED, IT JUST *HAPPENED*, THAT'S ALL, AND QUIT ASKIN' ME WHAT I WAS *THINKIN'*-- I DON'T *REMEMBER* WHAT I WAS THINKIN' I WASN'T THINKIN' *NUTHIN'* I WAS JUST *SITTIN'* THERE, THAT'S ALL, JUST TAKIN' IN THE SUNDAY SUN AND SHARIN' A BEER WITH RANCE AND CARTER AND JIMBO, I WAS JUST MINDIN' MY OWN BUSINESS, THAT'S ALL! WE WAS ALL HAVIN' A LITTLE SUNDAY *BARBECUE*, JUST TAKIN' IT EASY, JUST LAYIN' BACK. CARTER HAD THIS DOG, THIS *MUTT* HE GOT SOMEWHERE AND I THINK IT *PEED* ON THE PICNIC TABLE OR SOMETHIN I DON'T REMEMBER, CARTER WAS *YELLIN'* AT IT, BEATIN' IT WITH A STICK OR SOMETHIN' CALLIN' IT *NAMES... CALLIN' IT NAMES...*

LOUSY GODDAMN *CUR!* LOUSY STINKIN' LITTLE *SCUM!*

Rand Holmes

RANCE WAS SHOWIN' JIMBO HIS NEW *QUAIL GUN*

YOU *LOADING* IT ?

Y' GOTTA SEE THESE *AUTOMATIC EJECTORS*

I I DON'T REMEMBER HOW IT GOT IN MY HANDS ...IT JUST SORT OF... APPEARED THERE...

HEY!

?

KLAK

NEXT THING I KNOWED I WAS STANDIN' THERE ON THE LAWN IN FRONT OF CARTER, SHOVIN' THE MUZZLE OF THAT GUN INTO HIS *PRIVATES...*

HUH?

WHAT THE HELL YOU *DOIN'* SIM, THIS YOUR IDEA OF A JO--

SCRIPT: BRUCE JONES ART AND LETTERING: RAND HOLMES
Coloring: Joe Chiodo

...I DON'T REMEMBER NUTHIN' AFTER THAT

YA AAGHH

BLAM

EEEEEEE!

HOLY CHRIST!

JESUS

FLOP

RANCE STAY AWAY FROM HIM!

CRAZY BASTARD WHAT'RE YOU...

OH GOD OH MY GOD!!

SIM CHRIST, STOP IT!

NOOOOOOO!!

BLAM

DROP IT, SIM... DROP IT!

NGGH

AAGGH!

UNH!

FOOM

YAGGGG GRUNH!

HELP HIM! ...OH GOD... SOMEBODY HELP HIM!

...AND YOU DON'T REMEMBER JIMBO DYING IN THE *FIRE* OR *SHOOTING* RANCE AND CARTER?

NO MISTER BRINKS I *TOLD* YOU I DON'T REMEMBER NUTHIN' ABOUT THAT THEY WAS MY THREE *BEST FRIENDS*

THREE *NEWLY WIDOWED* WITNESSES CLAIM YOU DID SIM...

I NEVER *SAID* I DIDN'T *DO* IT MR. BRINKS I JUST SAID I DON'T *REMEMBER*

I'M *TIRED* NOW, ARE WE ALMOST THROUGH?

WHY WOULD I WANT TO *KILL* THEM?

YOUR *LIFE* IS ALMOST THROUGH, SIM, IF WE CAN'T COME UP WITH A BETTER STORY THAN *THAT!* YOU'VE BEEN PROVEN LEGALLY *SANE* THIS IS MURDER ONE BOY, AREN'T YOU JUST A *TAD* CONCERNED

I'M JUST A TAD *TIRED* IS WHAT I AM MR. BRINKS NOT THAT I AIN'T *APPRECIATIVE* SIR, NOR RESPECTFUL OF YER RECORD BUT I DON'T THINK YOU GOT A *CHANCE* THIS TIME

GUARD

AND WITH ALL DUE RESPECT OL' BUDDY I THINK YOU'VE MET YOUR *MATCH* THIS TIME...

THAT'S WHAT *SIM* SAID. WHY DON'T YOU BUY ME A DRINK AND WE'LL *BOTH* CRY ABOUT IT?

JAIL

SO WHAT HAVE YOU GOT, BEYOND *TEMPORARY* INSAN TY?

NOT MUCH. SIM WAS OBVIOUSLY *EXTREMELY* UPSET WITH HIS FRIENDS ABOUT SOMETHING... ALL *THREE* OF THEM.

THE QUESTION IS *WHAT*

WHAT ABOUT *SPORTS*? DID THE FOUR OF THEM EVER GO TO BASEBALL GAMES TOGETHER?

I ALREADY ASKED SIM. HE SAYS THEY HAVEN'T BEEN TOGETHER AS A GROUP IN OVER *TEN YEARS*

LET'S GO *BACK* A WAYS...YOU SAID YOU WERE CHILDHOOD *PALS*. WHAT DID YOU *DO* BACK THEN?

NUTHIN' MUCH. WENT FISHIN'... ...HUNTIN'...

WHAT *KIND* OF HUNTING?

ALL KINDS QUAIL...RABBIT...

DID YOU EVER OWN A *DOG* SIM?

NO

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHERS?

...CARTER.. CARTER HAD DOGS... HE ALWAYS HAD DOGS...CARTER THAT SOUTHERN SMART-ASS BASTARD...

WHY WAS HE A *BASTARD*?

...HAD A...A BIG BLACK LABRADOR ONCE...I...REMEMBER...I...

YES?

...I REMEMBER... THE CAR.. HE HAD THIS BIG BLACK SHINY CAR AND THIS...THIS BIG BEAUTIFUL BLACK DOG...

WHERE WAS THIS, SIM?

...WE WAS *HUNTING* OUT THERE IN THE MOUNTAINS...TEN, TWELVE YEARS AGO ...I...I REMEMBER CARTER JOINED US AT THE *CABIN* WITH THAT *DOG*...THAT BEAUTIFUL BLACK *DOG*...

WELL, WOULD YOU LOOK AT *THIS*?

WHOO-*WEE*! *HOTCHA*!

MEET *BANJO* BOYS! MAN'S *BEST* FRIEND! AND THE BEST LITTLE *RETRIEVER* IN THE BUSINESS!

YEAH CARTER BUT CAN HE *COOK?*

HAH, HAR!

THAT DOG DID EVERYTHING CARTER TOLD IT TO ... *EVERYTHING...*

ATTA BOY, BANJO *GOOD* BOY! NOW FETCH ME MY PIPE AND TOBACCO!

HA HA CARTER, YOU *SLAY* ME!

I *GOT* IT, RANCE!

GO *FETCH* IT NOW BANJO, *ATTA BOY!!*

KA BLAM

THE DOG *LOVED* CARTER...I THINK HE LOVED US *ALL*... BUT CARTER... THAT REBEL CREEP...

DOG'S HUNGRY CARTER WHY NOT GIVE HIM A LITTLE *QUAIL*

EH? CHOFF CHOMF

STINKIN' *MUTT!*...

I TOLE YOU NEVER TO COME IN HERE LES' I *BRUNG* YA! NOW GET OUT THERE IN THE *SHED* WHERE YA *BELONG!*

IT WAS COLD IN THE SHED... FREEZING AT TIMES... BUT CARTER DIDN'T CARE... I USED TO LIE AWAKE IN BED AT NIGHT LISTENING TO THAT POOR ANIMAL HOWL... THINKIN' OF THEM BIG BROWN EYES...

WHAT FINALLY HAPPENED TO THE DOG SIM?

I DON'T KNOW... HE DIED I GUESS ...IT WAS YEARS AGO...THEM EYES ...THEM BIG DARK EYES..

I KNOW THIS IS TOUGH MRS. CARTER SO I'LL BE BRIEF DO YOU REMEMBER ANY UNUSUAL INCIDENT BETWEEN YOUR HUSBAND, SIM AND YOUR DOG BANJO?

SNIFF.. ...DOG?

SIM SAYS CARTER USED TO TAKE THE DOG ON HUNTING TRIPS WITH HIM...

OH LORD I DON'T RECALL . SNIFF SNIFF.. CARTER HAD SO MANY PETS IT'S POSSIBLE I SUPPOSE WHY DO YOU ASK?

I ALREADY TOLD YOU ALL I REMEMBER ABOUT THE DOG...

TELL ME AGAIN

GET OFF MY *BED!* GET OFF MY *GODDAMN BED!* THAT'S *MY* BED! IT BELONGS TO *ME!*

EASY SIM

I'LL DO ANYTHING I *WANT* ON IT!

...YOU HERE ME? IT'S *MINE!*

SURE SIM SURE JUST *COOL OFF* NOW THE BED IS ALL YOURS

TELL ME ABOUT CARTER'S DOG AGAIN...

CARTER... UPPITY BASTARD .. ALWAYS PARADING AROUND LIKE A HOT-SHOT... ALWAYS THE BIG MAN WITH THE WOMEN.

... ALWAYS K CK N' THAT POOR DOG... ...BEATIN' THAT POOR BLACK DOG

HE'D RUN THAT WRETCHED ANIMAL ALL DAY AFTER QUAIL, THEN BEAT HIM HALF TO DEATH AT NIGHT....

LOUSY *CUR!* I TOLD YOU NEVER TO GO NEAR THEM BEDS! I CAN'T ABIDE THE LIKES OF YOU NEAR MY BED!

I REMEMBER... YEAH I REMEMBER IT SNOWED LIKE HELL THAT WINTER... THE ROADS COVERED OVER...WE WERE SNOWED IN, YOU COULDN'T EVEN WALK THROUGH THE STUFF...

WE RAN LOW ON FOOD... FIREWOOD... IT GOT COLD IN THE CABIN ...FREEZING YOU COULDN'T HARDLY SLEEP AT NIGHT...

HEY, SIM, RANCE AND ME IS BUSTIN' UP THE FURNITURE FOR A FIRE AND...

...WHAT THE *HELL*...

JESUS CHRIST! WHAT'RE YOU *DOIN'*?

H HE WAS *COLD* OUT THERE IN THE SHED, CARTER HE WAS FREEZ,N'

I WAS COLD TOO! I-I WAS ONLY TRYIN' TO GET *WARM*!

CARTER BEAT THAT DOG NEARLY UNCONSCIOUS BEFORE THROWING HIM BACK INTO THE SNOW. HE NEVER LOOKED AT ME THE SAME WAY AGAIN AFTER THAT...IT WAS LIKE I WAS A LEPER OR SOMETHIN'...

THREE MORE DAYS WENT BY WITHOUT FOOD... ...THEN CARTER ANNOUNCED HIS PLAN...

NO CARTER NOT BANJO! YOU *CAN'T*!

WE'RE STARVIN' YOU *IDIOT*!

YOU WANNA *DIE* OUT HERE? WELL *I* DON'T!

CARTER GAVE *EACH* OF US A GUN "WE'RE GONNA *SHARE* IN THIS!" HE SAID. BUT I *COULDN'T* GO I JUST *COULDN'T* I STOOD BY THE WINDOW AND WATCHED WHILE THE THREE OF THEM DRAGGED POOR BANJO OUT BEHIND THE SHED... ...I CAN *STILL* HEAR HIM SCREAMIN'...

KA GH

I REMEMBER THAT *LOOK* ON CARTER'S SMUG FACE AS HE SAT THERE AT THE TABLE ...I REMEMBER WHAT THE *BASTARD* SAID...

THIS (CHOMP-CHOMP) AIN'T HALF BAD FOR *ROAST COON DOG!*

...AND AFTER YOU ATE THE DOG YOU...

NOT ME! *I* NEVER ATE HIM! I NEVER *TOUCHED* HIM! NOT *ME!* I-I *COULDN'T* DO THAT! I COULD *NEVER* DO THAT!

ORDER MR SIM.

WHY IS IT YOU NEVER *DISCUSSED* THE DOG INC DENT WITH ANYONE SIM?... I MEAN YOU ALMOST *FROZE* TO DEATH THAT WINTER YET MRS. CARTER KNEW *NOTHING* OF THE INCIDENT, COULDN'T EVEN RECALL THE *DOG.* WHY IS THAT?

CARTER SWORE HE--

--I-I DUNNO ...I JUST *FORGOT* IS ALL..

D.D CARTER MAKE YOU PROMISE NOT TO TELL? IS *THAT* IT?

...NO...WHY *SHOULD* HE?

TELL US AGAIN ABOUT *SHOOTING* THE DOG, WHAT WAS IT YOU HEARD THE DOG DOING?

...H-HOWLIN'... I HEARD HIM *HOWLIN'*...

YOU SAID *'SCREAMING'! 'I CAN STILL HEAR HIM SCREAMING'* YOU SAID. SHALL I HAVE IT READ BACK?

I M-MEANT HOWLIN'...

HE WAS *HOWLIN'!*

YOU MEANT *SCREAMING* SIM--AND DOGS DON'T SCREAM DO THEY? TELL US AGAIN ABOUT THAT DAY CARTER FIRST BROUGHT BANJO TO THE CABIN

H HE JUST S-STEPPED OUT OF THE CAR WITH THE D-DOG AND...

THE *DOG* SIM? THE *DOG?* WHY DON'T YOU TELL IT THE WAY IT *REALLY* WAS?

MEET *BANJO* BOYS! MAN'S *BEST* FRIEND! AND THE BEST LITTLE *RETRIEVER* IN THE BUSINESS!

YEAH CARTER, BUT CAN HE *COOK?*

HA-HAR!

NO! NO! THAT AIN'T THE WAY IT WAS AT ALL!

THE CABIN, SIM, TELL US ABOUT CARTER AND BANJO IN THE CABIN...

HE D.D EVERYTHING DIDN'T HE SIM?... BANJO DID EVERYTHING CARTER TOLD HIM TO...

ATTA BOY BANJO GOOD BOY! NOW FETCH ME MY PIPE AND TOBACCO

HA HA CARTER YOU SLAY ME!

I GOT IT RANCE!

GO FETCH IT NOW BANJO ATTA BOY!

KA-BLAM

HE BEAT BANJO, DIDN'T HE, SIM... AND BANJO TOOK IT BECAUSE HE HAD TO, ISN'T THAT RIGHT?

I CAN'T ABIDE THE LIKES OF YOU NEAR MY BED!

LOUSY CUR! I TOLD YOU NEVER TO GET NEAR THEM BEDS!

YOU WERE AFRAID TO TELL WEREN T YOU SIM, AFRAID THAT CARTER WOULD TELL EVERYONE ABOUT YOU AND BANJO. . ..ABOUT THE BED...

OH CHRIST OH JESUS! I (SOB) WAS JUST TRYIN' TO GET WARM I DIDN'T DO NUTHIN' BAD! (SOB) IT WAS SO COLD!

I NEVER TOUCHED HIM I SWEAR!

... AND I NEVER (SOB) TOUCHED HIM LATER, NEITHER (SOB) ... AT THE TABLE ...I NEVER TOUCHED HIM!

TH S (CHOMP-CHOMP) AIN'T HALF BAD FOR ROAST COON!

YOUR HONOR... THE DEFENSE RESTS...

... (SOB-SOB) NEVER (SOB) TOUCHED H M (SOB)...NEVER TOUCHED... (CHOKE)...

YOU, ILLUSION

YOU CAN'T IMAGINE THE INCREDIBLE PAIN, THE SEARING DRIVING AGONY OF IT, SO I WON'T EVEN ATTEMPT TO DESCRIBE IT. ONE HAS TO LIVE IT TO APPRECIATE IT FULLY. I LIVED IT. I LIVED EVERY BRAIN-SHATTERING, MIND-SCREAMING MICRO-SECOND OF IT. AND THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO ABOUT IT--NOTHING ANYONE COULD DO ABOUT IT... NO ONE BUT INGLES, THAT IS. AND INGLES WOULDN'T COOPERATE. INGLES WOULDN'T EVEN TRY! OH, HE SAID HE WAS TRYING, HE SAID HE WAS DOING HIS BEST, BUT ALL I SAW WAS THE ENDLESS ROUNDS OF BLACKJACK... THE SUN COMING UP OVER THE TREES IN HIS BACKYARD... AND ALL I FELT WAS THE UNENDING TORTURE FLOODING THROUGH ME, PRAYING, SCREAMING FOR RELEASE...

I'LL STAND, MR. MARKHAM. WOULD YOU CARE FOR A CARD?...

WAS IT ONLY THIS MORNING THAT I FIRST SAW INGLES? IT SEEMS LIKE CENTURIES AGO... EONS AGO...

IS THAT OUR NEW NEIGHBOR?

STORY BRUCE JONES ART: JOHN BOLTON

Letters Carrie McCarthy Colors Joe Chiodo

EEEK!

OH DEAR, I'M SOO SORRY! DID I HURT YOU? HOW CLUMSY...

OH, T-THAT'S-- I-IT'S QUITE ALL RIGHT...

I-I DIDN'T REALIZE ANYONE WAS OVER THERE --

JUST MOVED IN! DELIGHTFUL LITTLE NEIGHBORHOOD! I HAVE AN ORANGE TREE IN MY YARD' AN ORANGE TREE IN OKLAHOMA, CAN YOU IMAGINE?

AH, IS THAT *MR.* MARKHAM?

HELLO...

AFTERNOON, MY BOY! INGLES IS THE NAME! HOW DO YOU DO? SO NICE TO MEET SUCH A *LOVELY* YOUNG COUPLE! ISN'T THIS DELIGHTFUL? LIVED HERE QUITE A SPELL, HAVE YOU?

WE JUST--

LOVELY NEIGHBORHOOD! I WAS JUST TELLING YOUR BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WIFE! *FIRST RATE* NEIGHBORHOOD! I HAVE AN *ORANGE TREE*, WOULD YOU *BELIEVE* IT? TELL ME, ARE *ALL* THE YOUNG WOMEN HERE AS INCREDIBLE AS YOUR SWEET SPOUSE, EH? COME, MY DEAR, LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT YOU!

MAGNIFICENT, REALLY MAGNIFICENT! SLIM WAIST, FIRM THIGHS, FULL BOSOM, JUST EXEMPLARY, REALLY!

NOW JUST A--

BUT I'M FORGETTING MYSELF! YOU MUST COME FOR DINNER, OF COURSE! SHALL WE SAY SIX!SH? I HAVE SOME LOVELY RIBS! WE'LL HAVE A FINE TIME!

DON'T BE LATE NOW, WILL YOU?

CRIPES, WHAT A NUT! THAT WAS INTENTIONAL, YOU KNOW!

THE INVITATION?

SQUIRTING YOU WITH THE HOSE. I SAW IT. WE HAVE A CREEPY OLD VOYEUR FOR A NEIGHBOR

OH, ROBERT, HE'S NOT SO BAD, KINDA SWEET, I THINK.

M-M? AND HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE YOU'VE GIVEN A PASSING NOD TO MY FIRM THIGHS AND FULL BOSOM?

I'VE NODDED PLENTY OF TIMES. WE AREN'T GOING, ARE WE? TO DINNER?

NOT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO, DEAR...

I DO NOD, YOU KNOW...

ROBERT! (TEE-HEE!) WHAT ARE YOU DOING? THE NEIGHBORS!

TO HELL WITH 'EM! YOU WANNA BE APPRECIATED OR NOT? THEY DON'T WATCH US WITH BINOCULARS, YOU KNOW!

EXCELLENT WINE, MR. INGLES.

YES, IT IS, ISN'T IT? I MAKE IT MYSELF, YOU KNOW!

OH? I WOULD HAVE GUESSED IT TO BE OF QUITE AN OLD VINTAGE...

IT IS! 1923, ACTUALLY.

YOU MEAN YOUR *FAMILY* MAKES IT.

NO, I MEAN *I* MAKE IT. I MAKE EVERYTHING IN THE HOUSE, MRS. MARKHAM... THE SOFA YOU'RE SITTING ON, THE OTHER FURNITURE...

YOU'RE IN FURNITURE, MR. INGLES?

AMONG OTHER THINGS, I'M WHAT YOU MIGHT CALL AN... INSTIGATOR.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS, MRS MARKHAM?

OH, IT'S *BEAUTIFUL!* THEY AREN'T--

REAL? BUT OF *COURSE!* HERE, MY DEAR, I WANT YOU TO HAVE IT!

HAVE IT? I--OH, NO, I--

WE COULDN'T POSSIBLY ACCEPT, MR. INGLES!

QUITE BECOMES HER, DOESN'T IT? LOVELY... I THINK I SHALL ENJOY STAYING IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD!

HAVE YOU SEEN MY ORANGE TREE? I'M THINKING ABOUT PLANTING ANOTHER!

I MEANT TO ASK YOU ABOUT THAT, HOW DID YOU GROW IT?

I DIDN'T *GROW* IT, MR. MARKHAM, I *CREATED* IT. JUST AS I DID THE FURNITURE, THE DIAMONDS... THE WAY I CREATED THIS NEIGHBORHOOD...

I SEE... WELL, IT'S GETTING A BIT LATE, AND--

EVER HAD A *DREAM*, MR MARKHAM? EVER HAD A DREAM SO *VIVID*, SO *EXPLICIT*, THAT IT WAS AS REAL AS ANYTHING YOU'D EVER EXPERIENCED IN WAKING LIFE? I REMEMBER WHEN I FIRST KNEW I HAD THE POWER..

"IT WAS DURING THE COURSE OF ONE OF THOSE TYPICALLY HEROIC DREAMS WE ALL HAVE--YOU KNOW, SHINING KNIGHT SLAYS THE DRAGON, WINS THE FAIR MAIDEN..

"AS I STOOD THERE WATCHING MY BEAUTIFUL PRIZE, I BECAME AWARE OF THE POWER FLOODING THROUGH ME - THE *CONTROL* I HAD OVER THE SCENE THE YOUNG LADY I WISHED HER BLONDE--AND SUDDENLY SHE *WAS* BLONDE!

"THAT WAS THE BEGINNING BUT I DIDN'T STOP THERE. I WISHED HER A REDHEAD SHE BECAME A REDHEAD I WISHED HER PLUMPER AND SHE WAS PLUMPER SLIMMER AND SHE OBEYED I WISHED THREE OF HER, SIX OF HER, A *DOZEN* OF HER, AND MY DESIRES WERE FULFILLED!

"I COULD CHANGE THE LOCALE FROM A TANGLED WOOD TO A DESERT ISLE... I COULD HAVE A SINGLE WOMAN OR A THOUSAND WOMEN, EACH MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN THE ONE BEFORE... AND EACH VIVID AND BREATHING AND ALIVE DOWN TO THE SMALLEST DETAIL... "

AND THE BEST PART WAS, I COULD CONTROL *WHEN* I WOKE UP, WHEN I CAME BACK TO THE *REAL* WORLD! AND YOU KNOW WHAT? I I FOUND I DIDN'T *WANT* TO GO BACK TO THE REAL WORLD-- WHY SHOULD I? *WHY?* WHEN I COULD HAVE EVERYTHING I EVER--HEH-HEH-- *DREAMED* OF, IN MY *SLEEPING WORLD!*

THAT'S WHEN I GOT THE IDEA TO CHECK INTO A HOSPITAL TO COMPLAIN OF A PHONY BACKACHE TO PUT MYSELF ASLEEP *FOREVER!*

THEY TAKE *CARE* OF ME, YOU SEE, FEED ME INTRAVENOUSLY, LIKE A COMA PATIENT AND I DREAM ON AND ON IN THIS BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL WORLD OF THE MIND..

(AHEM!)...IT, UH, SOUNDS *FASCINATING*, MR. INGLES, BUT WE REALLY MUST--

DON'T YOU EVER GET BORED, MR. INGLES? DON'T YOU EVER WANT TO RETURN TO THE *REAL WORLD*?

OCCASIONALLY. AND I DO IT THE SAME WAY I GET INTO *THIS* WORLD: I FALL ASLEEP! FALLING ASLEEP *BRINGS ME BACK TO CONSCIOUSNESS!* HA-HA! REMARKABLE, NO?

EXCEPT THAT I'M SO RARELY SLEEPY IN MY DREAM WORLD. IN FACT, ABOUT THE ONLY THING THAT WILL REALLY MAKE ME NOD OFF IS A GOOD LONG BORING GAME OF BLACKJACK. I DETEST CARDS, YOU KNOW!

REALLY, BETH, IT'S GETTING LATE...

MRS MARKHAM DOESN'T *WANT* TO GO, DO YOU, MY DEAR? MRS. MARKHAM IS ENTRANCED WITH ME ... WANTS TO KNOW MORE ABOUT ME, DON'T YOU, DEAREST BETH?..

..I..

LOVELY... SO LOVELY.. BUT I DON'T MUCH LIKE THAT DRESS ANYMORE...

.. SHALL WE GET RID OF IT?

RIP

BETTER! THAT'S *MUCH* BETTER!

WHAT THE HELL--!!

CRACK!

SLIMY CREEP!

(HEH-HEH!) IT'S MORE *FUN* WHEN THE JEALOUS HUSBAND IS AROUND, DON'T YOU THINK, ROBERT? *HA-HA-HA!*

I HOPE YOU'RE *SATISFIED* NOW! I *TOLD* YOU THAT GUY WAS A NUT!

...HIS VOICE.. SO *COMPELLING*..

I'LL SEND A COP AROUND TOMORROW LET'S GET SOME SLEEP NOW.

HIS *EYES*...I NEVER SAW SUCH A LOOK OF RAW ANIMAL...*LUST*...IT WAS TERRIFYING...

SUPPOSE IT WERE TRUE, ROBERT... SUPPOSE HE REALLY COULD DO THAT... LIVE IN A WORLD WITHOUT MORALS, WITHOUT LAWS, WHERE YOUR EVERY WHIM WAS JUST A THOUGHT AWAY...

ARE YOU TERRIFIED OR ENVIOUS?

HEY! WHAT-- *CHRIST!*

BETH! THE LAMP! LOOK AT THE LAMP!

BETH?...

GLICK.

BETH!! *NO!!*

INGLES! INGLES!!

INGLES! NO! WAKE UP!

..EH WHA--??

INGLES! WAKE UP!

TISK-TISK! YOU SHOULD HAVE LET ME SLEEP, MY BOY... THERE'S REALLY NOTHING I CAN DO ONCE THE PROCESS HAS BEGUN...

IS THE PAIN QUITE TERRIBLE?... YES, IT MUST BE...

I'LL *NEVER* GET BACK TO SLEEP NOW! OH, WELL, I SUPPOSE WE CAN GIVE IT A TRY. YOU *DO* PLAY BLACKJACK, DON'T YOU, MY BOY? I'LL GET THE CARDS...

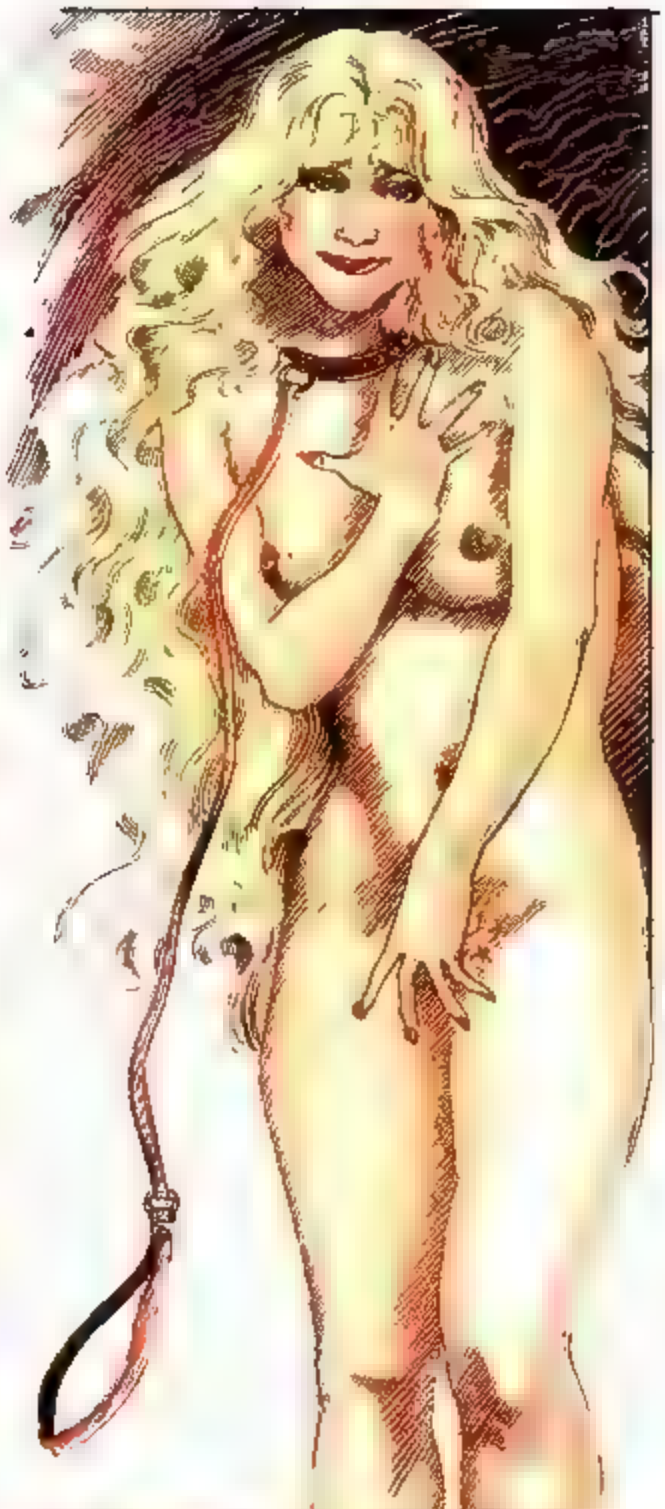
...BLURBLE...

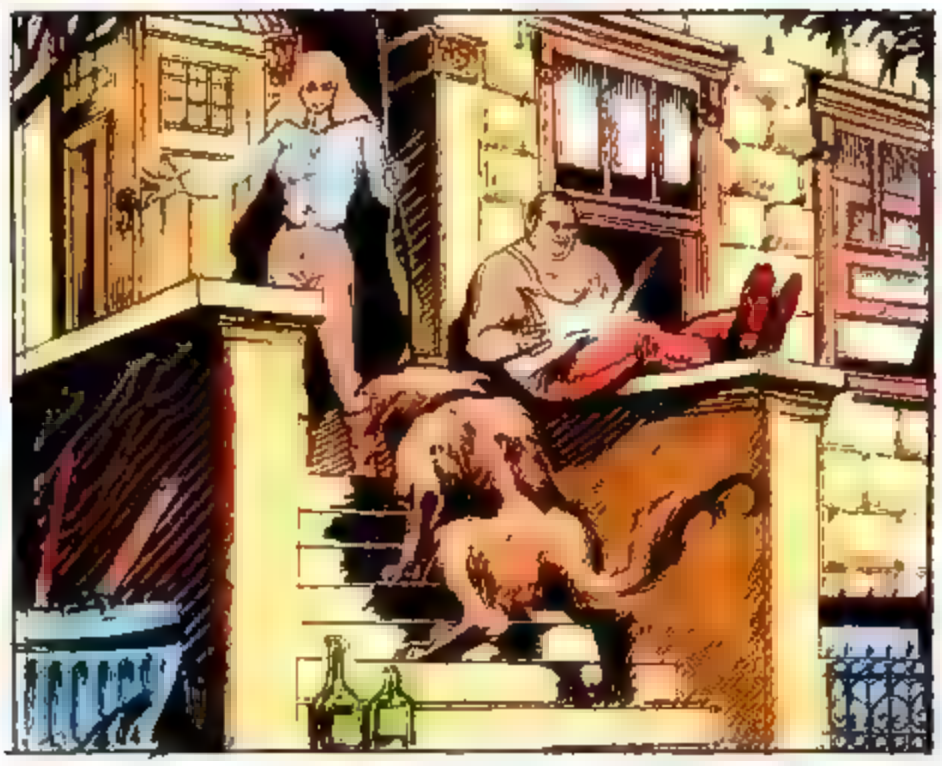
HOURS NOW... ENDLESS, HIDEOUSLY PAINFUL HOURS... AND ONE AWFUL THOUGHT KEEPS PECKING AT MY TORTURED BRAIN... COULD INGLES MAKE IT ALL RIGHT AGAIN IF HE WANTED TO, COULD HE MAKE BETH AND ME NORMAL..OR IS THIS HIS WAY OF PUNISHING ME?...

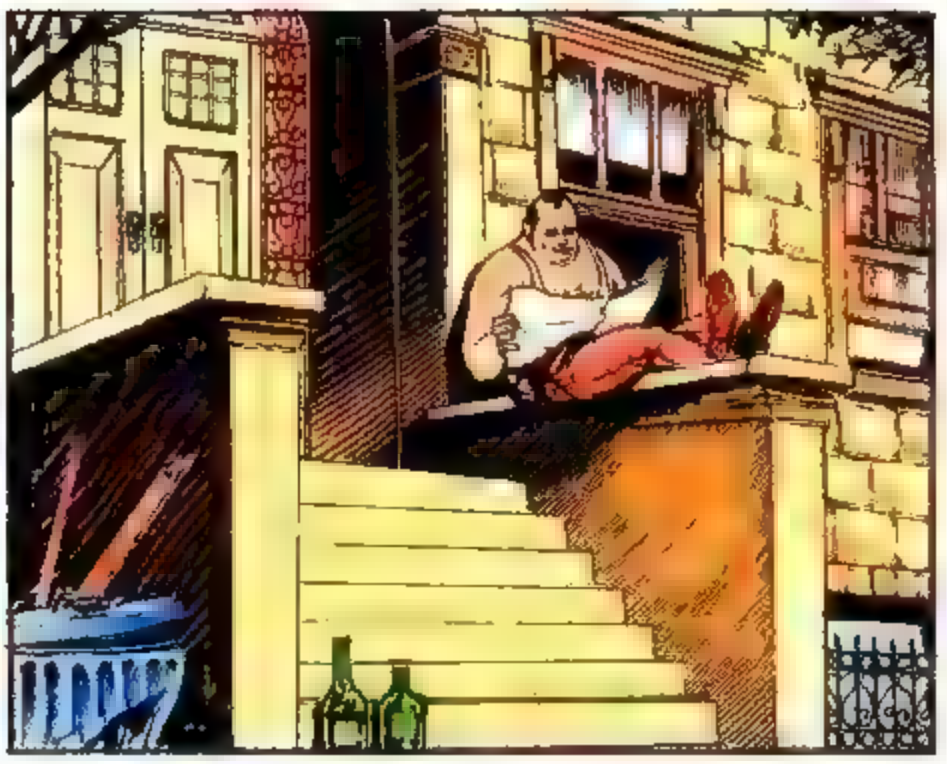
BLACKJACK! (HEE-HEE!) I WIN!

EVENING WALK

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: JOHN TOTLEBEN
Colors Daryl Isaacs







HOME TIES

IT HADN'T BEEN A GREAT WEEK. EVERYTHING WAS SET FOR THE LEFT-HANDED GUN"; THEY'D HIRED THIS BOY-GENIUS FROM TV NAMED PENN TO DIRECT AND, AFTER MONTHS OF NEGOTIATION, DEAN HAD COME OFF HIS "GIANT" HIGH-HORSE LONG ENOUGH TO CONSENT TO PLAY THE LEAD. WE'RE GOING FOR COLOR, SCOPE, THE WHOLE WORKS, SOLLY TELLS ME...THEN PRESTO, DEAN WRAPS HIS PORSCHE AROUND AN OLD FORD, WARNER'S GETS SCARED AND OUT GOES THE COLOR AND BIG BUDGET ALONG WITH THE STAR. BRANDO SAYS NO WAY AND HOLDEN IS DOING SOMETHING ABOUT A MID-WESTERN PICNIC. THEY STICK US WITH SOME NEW KID NAMED NEWMAN. FORGET IT, I TELL SOLLY, YOU CAN SHOVE YOUR BILLY THE KID EPIC, I'D RATHER WORK WITH JOSH ON THE MID-WESTERN PICNIC THING. "YOU WON'T LIKE IT," SOLLY WARNS ME, "IT'S LOCATION SHOOTING..." "I *LOVE* THE MIDWEST," I REPLY. HMPH. YOU EVER BEEN TO SALINA, KANSAS?...

STORY. BRUCE JONES ART. MIKE HOFFMAN
Letters Carrie McCarthy Colors Joe Chiodo

AH, WELL, NICE TO BE OUT OF THE L.A. SMOG AWHILE AND IN ITS OWN QUAINT WAY, SALINA ISN'T SO BAD, I GUESS...

WHAT? NO LIMOUSINE?

KNOCK IT OFF, BROOKS: YOU'RE JUST THE PRODUCTION ASSISTANT, NOT THE HEAD WRITER...

SAY, PAL, WHERE DOES A GUY CATCH A CAB AROUND HERE?

YOU GOTS TO CALL ONE MISTER. THIS AIN'T NEW YORK CITY.

I NOTICED.

THE WILSHIRE HOTEL. UH... IT *DOES* HAVE HOT AND COLD RUNNING WATER...?

IT DOES NOW.

OH BROTHER!

HARRY CHESTER STILL MISSING

HOTEL

THAT'S WHEN IT HAPPENED. I WAS JUST PASSING THE COFFEE SHOP WHEN I SAW HIM.. HARRY CHESTER THE GUY ON ALL THE FRONT PAGES...

SALINA COFFEE SH

HOLY—

HARRY. HARRY. IT'S ME! PHILIP BROOKS!

I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT. HARRY WAS ALIVE AND WELL. I DASHED INSIDE, BRIMMING WITH QUESTIONS...

HARRY, I--

WHAT TH-- GONE...HE'S *GONE!*

I CHECKED INTO MY ROOM... THEN I CHECKED INTO THE LOCAL PHONE BOOK...

HE WAS *THERE*, ALL RIGHT, THAT MEAL WAS ONLY HALF EATEN!

I DIDN'T REALLY EXPECT TO FIND ANYTHING. I WENT DOWNSTAIRS, HAD DINNER, THEN RENTED A CAR AND DROVE AROUND JUST TO GET OUT OF THE STUFFY HOTEL...

ONE OF THE HOTTEST DIRECTORS IN HOLLYWOOD AND SUDDENLY HE JUST ISN'T THERE ANYMORE...THAT MAKES IT *TWICE* I'VE SEEN HIM DISAPPEAR...

THAT T-BIRD. THAT'S HARRY'S! I'D BET ANYTHING ON IT.

FEELING SOMEWHAT FOOLISH, I WALKED UP TO THE VICTORIAN DOOR AND KNOCKED AWAY...

HARRY...IT *IS* YOU.

HELLO, PHIL... I SUPPOSE YOU'LL WANT TO COME IN...YES...WHY NOT.

WHERE THE DEVIL HAVE YOU BEEN, OLD MAN? YOUR WIFE--THE POLICE--

I LIVE HERE NOW...WITH ANGELIQUE...

ANGEL QUE--?

SHE'LL BE DOWN IN A MINUTE... CARE FOR A DRINK?

I'D CARE FOR SOME EXPLANATION IS WHAT I'D CARE FOR!

I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'D CONSIDER SIMPLY CLIMBING BACK INTO YOUR CAR AND DRIVING AWAY, WOULD YOU?

NO, I DON'T SUPPOSE I WOULD.

I THOUGHT NOT. (SIGH) OKAY, HERE IT IS... THE WHOLE STORY... SIT BACK...

"I WAS IN TOWN ON BUSINESS--A WESTERN-- THREE YEARS AGO WHEN I HAPPENED BY THE HOUSE IN MY CAR."

"I SAW A LOVELY FEMALE FIGURE SILHOUETTED IN THE UP STAIRS WINDOW. I ALSO NOTICED THAT THE DOWNSTAIRS DOOR WAS AJAR..."

"I STOPPED AND APPROACHED THE HOUSE, INTENDING TO WARN THE OWNERS THAT THEIR DOOR HAD BEEN LEFT OPEN. I KNOCKED BUT NO ONE ANSWERED ...SO I PUSHED OPEN THE DOOR AND STEPPED INSIDE..."

"AS I STARTED ACROSS THE FOYER, A FIGURE APPEARED ON THE STAIRCASE..."

"THE LOVELY FIGURE OF THE WOMAN I SAW IN THE WINDOW..."

"SHE WAS RAVISHING...THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CREATURE I'D EVER LAID EYES UPON..."

AH, HERE SHE IS NOW! MEET ANGELIQUE!

I LOOKED UPON THE MOST INTOXICATINGLY BEAUTIFUL WOMAN I HAD EVER SEEN...

NO NEED TO STAND FOR ANGELIQUE, PHIL...

LOVELY, ISN'T SHE?

EXQUISITE.

NEVER MIND, OLD MAN, ANGELIQUE CAN LIGHT HER OWN CIGARETTE...

NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS NOW, PHIL, DON'T MOVE OR INTERFERE IN ANY WAY...

THERE WAS A SUDDEN KNOCKING AT THE DOOR. IMMEDIATELY ANGELIQUE ROSE TO ANSWER IT...

A TALL DARK MAN IN FORMAL EVENING ATTIRE STOOD THERE. ANGELIQUE BADE HIM ENTER. THEY EMBRACED...

W-WHO IS IT? HER BROTHER?

BE PATIENT, YOU'LL SEE...

SILENCE FOR A FEW MOMENTS THEN-- SHOCKINGLY--THE UNMISTAKABLE SOUNDS OF LOVEMAKING.

HARRY, WHAT THE DEVIL--??

AFTER A TIME, THE YOUNG MAN IN EVENING ATTIRE DESCENDED THE STAIRS AGAIN, STRAIGHTENING HIS TIE. ANGELIQUE APPEARED AT THE UPSTAIRS BANNISTER A MOMENT LATER ...BUT THERE WERE TEARS STREAKING HER LOVELY FACE...

PETER...

IT ALL HAPPENED IN SECONDS...

BLAM!

JESUS...

PHIL, DON'T--

NO!

BLAM!

OH GOD...OH CHRIST, I'M GOING TO BE SICK...

I DASHED PAST THE CRUMPLED RAG DOLL AT MY FEET, SEARCHING DESPERATELY FOR AN UPSTAIRS BATHROOM...

WHEN I'D FINISHED WRETCHING...

SORRY, OLD MAN. I WANTED TO SPARE YOU THAT... COME, LET'S HAVE A DRINK...

BUT WHEN I LOOKED AT THE SPOT WHERE ANGELIQUE HAD LAIN...

WHAT TH-- GONE! SH-SHE'S VANISHED!!

YES...THE MOST VIVID, DETAILED, CLEARLY DISCERNABLE HAUNTING IN THE HISTORY OF GHOSTS AND SPECTRES. I WATCH IT EVERY NIGHT...

BUT THIS IS FANTASTIC! YOU'VE GOT TO TELL THE POLICE--TH-THE PRESS! WE'VE GOT TO GET THIS THING ON TELEVISION!

I THOUGHT OF ALL THAT...

A COLD LIGHT FORMS IN HARRY'S EYES...

--I EVEN TRIED TO CALL THE POLICE AFTER THE FIRST TIME...BUT I COULDN'T. I COULDN'T. I'M IN *LOVE* WITH HER, PHIL...

IN LOVE...BUT SHE'S A--A *PHANTOM*! ARE YOU INSANE? WHAT ABOUT YOUR WIFE, YOUR HOME?

I'VE TRIED TO LEAVE... REALLY *TRIED*...BUT I CAN'T GET HER FACE OUT OF MY MIND...SHE'S HAUNTING ME ALL RIGHT, PHIL, MORE THAN YOU'LL EVER KNOW...AND IT'S WORTH IT, EVEN IF I CAN ONLY SEE HER FOR THOSE FEW MINUTES EACH NIGHT...

YES, I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING: HARRY CHESTER, BIG-SHOT MOVIE DIRECTOR, PHOTOGRAPHED, *SLEPT WITH* THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMEN IN THE WORLD! BUT NONE OF THEM ARE LIKE ANGELIQUE, *NONE* OF THEM...

YOU'VE SEEN HER, PHIL, YOU *KNOW* IT'S THE TRUTH...

BUT--

OH, I'VE THOUGHT OF WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I CHANGED THE PATTERN, LOCKED THE DOOR, PERHAPS. AT LEAST THAT WAY I WOULDN'T HAVE TO WATCH HIM KISS HER ...WATCH HER DIE... PERHAPS SHE'D EVENTUALLY COME TO *ME*! BUT WHAT IF IT BROKE THE CHAIN? WHAT IF SHE MERELY VANISHED? I COULDN'T TAKE THAT, I'D DIE I DON'T *WANT* HER TO REST IN PEACE!

THIS IS MADNESS, HARRY...

YOU--YOU WON'T *TELL* THEM, WILL YOU, PHIL? YOU WON'T TELL THEM WHERE I AM, WILL YOU? THEY'LL TAKE ME AWAY FROM HER! I COULDN'T *STAND* THAT!

YOU NEED HELP, HARRY--

JUST PROMISE ME, PHIL, PROMISE ME YOU'LL KEEP MY SECRET! I WOULDN'T WANT TO *LIVE* IF I COULDN'T SEE ANGELIQUE'S FACE AGAIN!

ALL RIGHT, HARRY... I PROMISE...

HARRY SAT ALONE IN THE DARKNESS LONG AFTER MY FOOTSTEPS HAD RECEDED DOWN THE FRONT WALK. THE BIG GRANDFATHER CLOCK TICKED TIRELESSLY BEHIND HIM..

HE SAT THAT WAY FOR A GOOD THREE HOURS, UNMOVING. UNTHINKING. THEN HE STARTED SUDDENLY AT A LIGHT RAPPING ON THE FRONT DOOR...

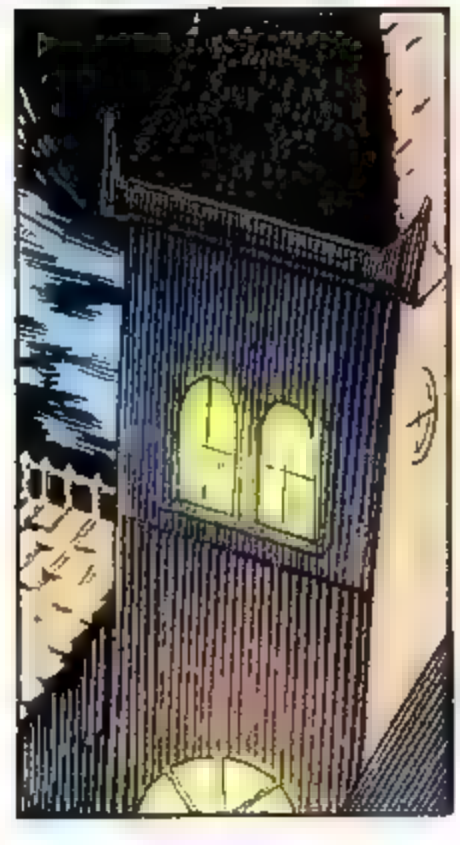
KNOCK KNOCK

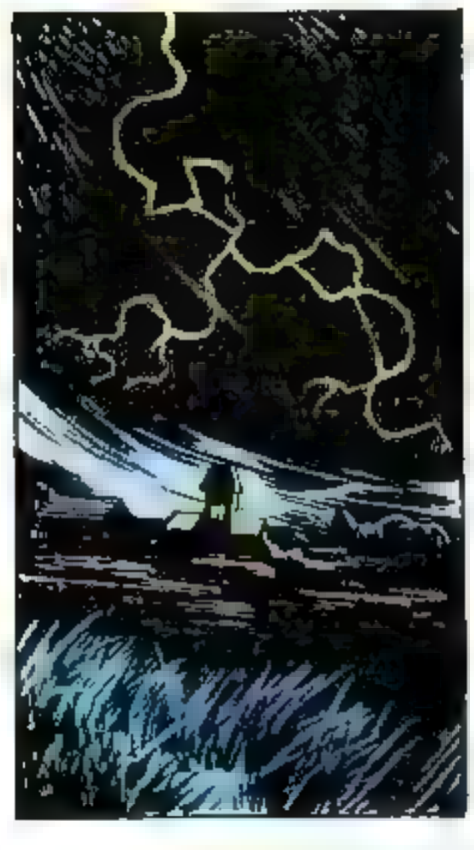
HARRY ANSWERED IT...IT WAS ME....

HARRY, I...LOOK, I DON'T HAVE TO BE ON LOCATION UNTIL FRIDAY MORNING... I...DO YOU SUPPOSE I COULD HAVE ONE MORE LOOK AT HER? ...JUST ONE MORE...?

LATER ON, HARRY WOULD TELL ME THAT HE'D NEVER SEEN SUCH A DESPERATE, PATHETIC LOOK ON ANYONE'S FACE BEFORE ...ANYONE'S BUT HIS OWN, THAT IS...

COME IN, PHIL...





Hollywood Times

SEPTEMBER 12, 1955

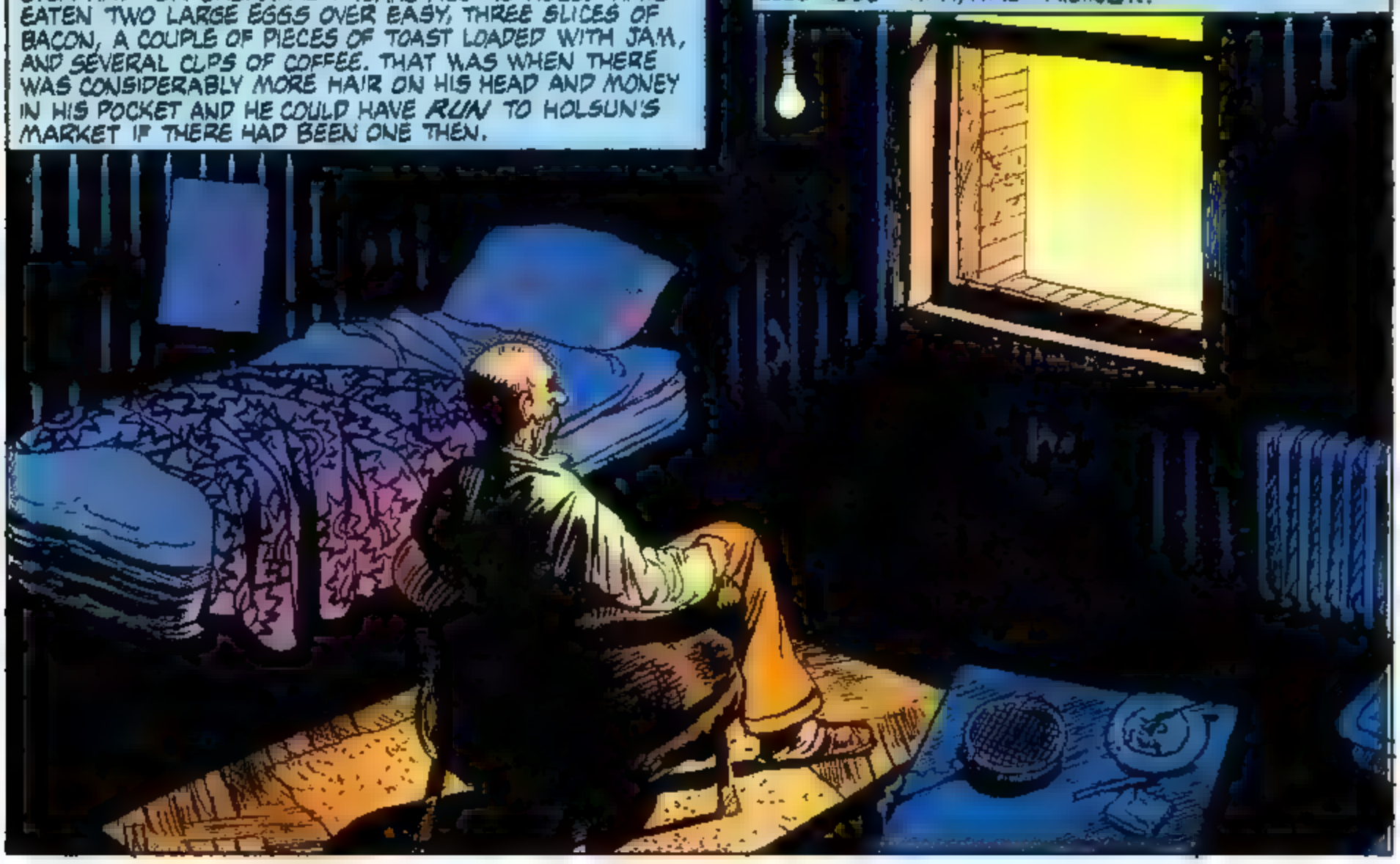
ANOTHER DISAPPEARANCE PLAGUES HOLLYWOOD COMMUNITY

HOLLYWOOD, CA — Police are still baffled by the sudden disappearance of Philip C Brooks, last seen at the Los Angeles train depot heading east on a business trip

ROOMERS

THE ARTHRITIS WAS VERY BAD TODAY IN HIS LEFT SHOULDER AND KNEE AND BY ELEVEN THAT MORNING HE HAD BEGUN TO HOPE QUITE EARNESTLY THAT THE FAT PIMPLY GIRL (CAROL? KATHY?--HE COULD NEVER REMEMBER HER NAME) WOULD COME WITH THE GROCERIES. OTHERWISE, HE'D BE FORCED TO MAKE THE PAINFUL, ENDLESS BLOCK-AND-A-HALF JOURNEY TO HOLSUN'S MARKET AND BACK AND HE DEFINITELY DID NOT WANT TO DO THAT. HE HAD AWAKENED PROMPTLY AT SIX--JUST AS HE DID EVERY MORNING--AND HAD SHAVED AND UNLOCKED AND OPENED THE WINDOW TO LET THE WARM MORNING BREEZE IN AND FETCHED HIS NEWSPAPER AND DRUNK HIS RITUAL GLASS OF TROPICANA. IT WAS ALL HE EVER HAD FOR BREAKFAST. YEARS AGO HE WOULD HAVE EATEN TWO LARGE EGGS OVER EASY, THREE SLICES OF BACON, A COUPLE OF PIECES OF TOAST LOADED WITH JAM, AND SEVERAL CUPS OF COFFEE. THAT WAS WHEN THERE WAS CONSIDERABLY MORE HAIR ON HIS HEAD AND MONEY IN HIS POCKET AND HE COULD HAVE *RUN* TO HOLSUN'S MARKET IF THERE HAD BEEN ONE THEN.

NOT TODAY. TODAY HE FELT NO NEED FOR BREAKFAST. HUNGER, LIKE THE REST OF HIS LETHARGIC ROUTINE, DIDN'T AROUSE ITSELF UNTIL NOON. CONVERSELY, HE FOUND IT NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO SLEEP LATER THAN SIX IN THE MORNING AND PHYSICALLY EXHAUSTING TO STAY AWAKE LATER THAN NINE AT NIGHT. WHEN, BY ELEVEN O'CLOCK, HUNGER DID BEGIN TO NAW AT LAST, HE CHECKED THE SINGLE CUPBOARD ABOVE THE SINGLE SINK AND FOUND IT, LIKE OLD MOTHER HUBBARD'S, BONE BARE. IT IRRITATED HIM. NOT BECAUSE IT WAS EMPTY... BUT BECAUSE HE'D AWAKENED NOT *KNOWING* IT WAS EMPTY. HIS MEMORY, LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE ABOUT HIM, WAS FAILING...



HE'D FINISHED WITH THE PAPER BY EIGHT O'CLOCK, HAVING READ ONLY ABOUT A QUARTER OF IT. THIS WAS ALSO RITUAL AND WAS BECAUSE HIS EYES BEGAN TO HURT BY THEN AND BECAUSE HE WAS BECOMING LESS AND LESS INTERESTED IN WHAT THE WORLD WAS DOING TO ITSELF. THAT LEFT A GAP OF THREE HOURS TO FILL BETWEEN NEWSPAPER AND LUNCH. USUALLY HE WENT FOR A WALK BUT TODAY THE ARTHRITIS SAID NO...

HE HAD NEVER OWNED A TV AND HIS RADIO WAS BROKEN. HE'D HAD IT FIXED TWICE BUT EVEN WHEN IT WAS WORKING, ALL HE COULD GET WAS BLARING ROCK-AND-ROLL AND HE DIDN'T LIKE ROCK-AND-ROLL. WHAT HE LIKED WAS GABRIEL HEATER BUT GABRIEL HEATER WAS DEAD NOW. SO HE USUALLY JUST SAT IN THE CHAIR AND WATCHED THE STREET BELOW AND LISTENED TO THE TRAFFIC...

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART MICHELUZZI

Letters Carrie McCarthy Colors Joe Chiodo

HE THOUGHT ABOUT MANY THINGS BUT MOSTLY HE THOUGHT ABOUT DEATH. THEY WERE NOT MORBID THOUGHTS OR EXERCISES IN SELF-PITY BUT RATHER PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AS TO THE PROPER MODE. HE DID NOT FEAR DEATH BUT HE FEARED THE HUMILIATION OF IT. IF HE DIED IN BED FOR INSTANCE, IT MIGHT BE DAYS, EVEN WEEKS, BEFORE SOMEONE FOUND HIM AND BY THEN HE WOULD SMELL AND HE DID NOT WANT HIS FINAL ACT IN LIFE TO BE THAT OF BEING A NAUSEATING BURDEN TO SOMEONE ELSE...

HE HAD DECIDED THAT THE BEST PLACE TO DIE WAS IN THE TUB BECAUSE THE WATER WOULD KEEP HIM FOR SOME TIME BUT OF COURSE THEN HE WOULD BE FOUND NAKED. WAS IT WORSE, HE WONDERED, TO BE FOUND SMELLING OR TO BE FOUND NAKED? IT WAS A DIFFICULT QUESTION... HE DID NOT KNOW WHY IT WAS IMPORTANT TO HIM HOW HE WAS FOUND, ONLY THAT IT WAS...

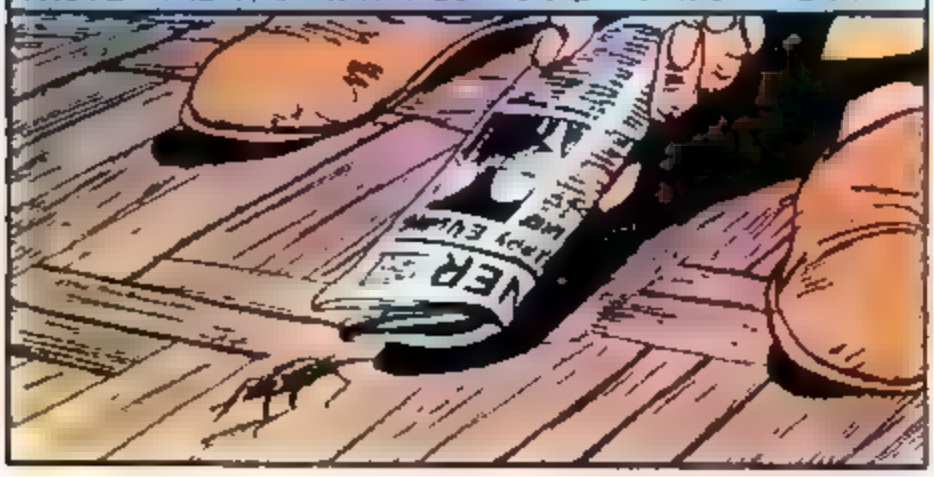
SOMETIMES HE WOULD FALL ASLEEP IN THE SOFA CHAIR WHILE WATCHING THE TRAFFIC. HE HAD BEGUN TO DO THIS MORE AND MORE FREQUENTLY DURING THE PAST YEAR BUT HE DIDN'T MIND BECAUSE SLEEPING AND DREAMING REALLY WERE OFTEN MORE PLEASANT THAN THE DULL ROUTINE OF HIS WAKING LIFE. SOME DAYS HE WOULD DO BOTH SO CONTINUOUSLY THAT REALITY AND UNREALITY MEETED TOGETHER AND HE COULD NOT SEPARATE THE TWO. BUT THAT WAS OKAY TOO BECAUSE WHO WAS TO SAY DREAMING WAS NOT ONE FORM OF REALITY?..

HE WAS ALWAYS A YOUNG MAN AGAIN WHEN HE DREAMED. HE NEVER DREAMED ABOUT HIS CURRENT AGE OR HIS LIFE IN THE APARTMENT. ALWAYS HE WAS IN HIS THIRTIES OR TWENTIES AND USUALLY HE WAS RUNNING SOMEWHERE VERY FAST AND HE COULD HEAR THE WIND IN HIS EARS. IT WAS MOST OFTEN IN THE COUNTRY OR ALONG A SUNNY BEACH. ONCE HE DREAMED ABOUT A GIRL AND THEY HAD SEXUAL RELATIONS AND THAT SURPRISED HIM BECAUSE HE THOUGHT HE'D FORGOTTEN ABOUT SUCH THINGS..

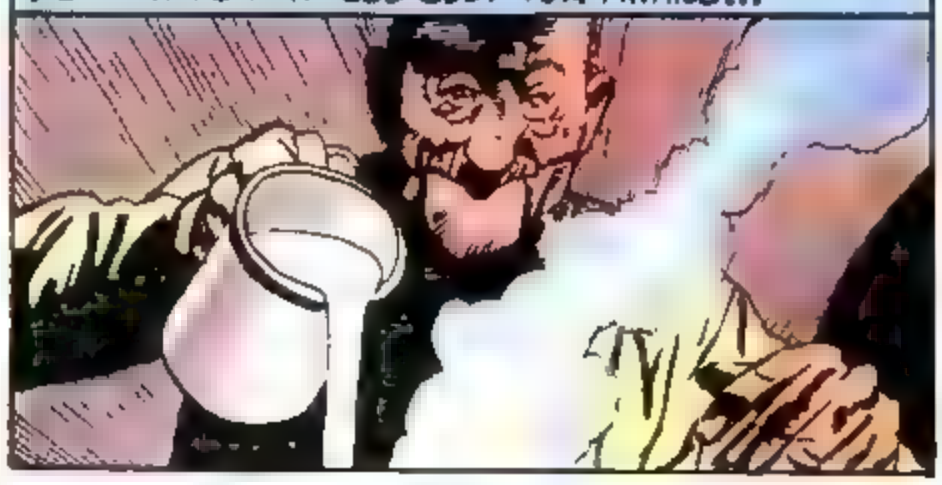
HE WAS NOT ALONE IN THE SINGLE ROOM. BEHIND THE WALL BEHIND THE CUPBOARD THERE LIVED A FAMILY OF MICE. HE RARELY SAW THEM BUT HE HEARD THEM OFTEN ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT. THEY SCAMPERED AND SQUEAKED AND SCOLDED AND DID WHATEVER THE MICE DO BETWEEN THE WALLBOARD SEPARATING HIS APARTMENT FROM THE ONE NEXT DOOR. IN THE BEGINNING HE HAD COMPLAINED TO MRS. MENDEZ, THE SUPER, BUT NOTHING HAD COME OF IT. SHE HAD EXPLAINED THAT THE EXTERMINATORS WANTED MORE THAN SHE COULD PAY.

ONE NIGHT, HE HAD WAKENED TO FIND ONE OF THE MICE IN BED WITH HIM. ODDLY HE DID NOT YELL OR KICK OR THRASH ABOUT. HE SIMPLY WATCHED QUIETLY AS THE ANIMAL CLIMBED CAREFULLY OVER THE HILLS AND VALLEYS OF HIS BEDCLOTHES STANDING OCCASIONALLY ON ITS HIND LEGS AND SNIFFING THE AIR. ITS WHITE WHISKERS ILLUMINATED BY COLD MOONLIGHT FROM THE WINDOW. AT LAST IT HAD CREPT OFF THE BED AND GONE TO SALVAGE IN THE CUPBOARD AND HE HAD GONE BACK TO SLEEP...

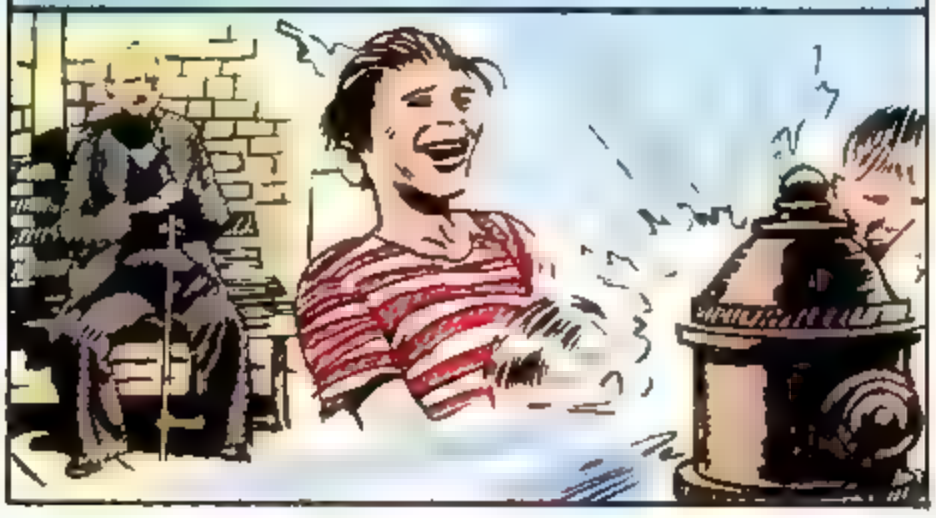
OTHER THINGS LIVED WITH HIM BESIDES THE MICE. THE APARTMENT BUILDING WAS OVERRUN WITH ROACHES AND THESE WERE A MUCH GREATER NUISANCE THAN THE MICE, WHICH HE RARELY SAW. THE ROACHES HE SAW BOTH DAY AND NIGHT--DARTING QUICKLY FROM UNDER A CHAIR OR WALKING LAZILY ACROSS A WALL--AND THEY GOT INTO EVERYTHING. HE USED TO HIT THEM WITH HIS SHOE OR A ROLLED NEWSPAPER AND AT ONE TIME HE BOUGHT BLACK FLAGG REGULARLY BUT THERE WAS NO KEEPING UP WITH THEM AND, BESIDES, IT GOT EXPENSIVE. ONLY ONCE HAD HE GOTTEN UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND TURNED ON THE LIGHT... THE CEILING, WALLS AND FURNITURE HAD APPEARED TO *MOVE*... HE HAD NEVER GOTTEN UP AT NIGHT AGAIN...



HE HATED THE ROACHES BECAUSE THEY WERE STUPID AND UGLY. HE SAW NO REASON WHY GOD HAD PUT THEM ON THE EARTH. HE DEVISED SEVERAL WAYS TO WREAK VENGEANCE ON THE ROACHES AND BOILING THEM ALIVE WAS HIS FAVORITE METHOD. HE WOULD CREEP QUIETLY TO THE HOT PLATE AND TURN ON THE HEAT UNDER THE KETTLE WHILE THEY WERE GATHERING IN THE SINK TO DRINK. HE HAD READ SOMEWHERE THAT THEY COULD GO WEEKS WITHOUT FOOD BUT MUST DRINK EVERY FEW DAYS. WHEN ENOUGH HAD GATHERED IN THE SINK AND THE WATER WAS BOILING IN THE KETTLE, HE WOULD QUICKLY POUR IT IN THE SINK AND WATCH THEM KICK AND SCRAMBLE AND DIE. IT MADE HIM FEEL GOOD FOR AWHILE...



WHEN HE DID GET OUT--WHEN THE ARTHRITIS LET HIM--HE WENT EITHER TO HOLSUN'S MARKET OR SAT OUT FRONT ON ONE OF THE BENCHES PROVIDED IN THE CENTER SAFETY LANE OF 103RD STREET. THERE HE WOULD WATCH THE CARS ZOOM BY ON BOTH SIDES. HE WOULD LIKED TO HAVE GONE TO THE PARK BUT IT WAS TOO FAR TO WALK AND SUBWAYS AND BUSES WERE EXPENSIVE. HE HAD SAVED FOR THREE WEEKS ONCE AND TAKEN THE BUS TO THE PARK AND IT HAD RAINED. NOW HE JUST SAT IN THE BENCHES OUTSIDE HIS APARTMENT... BUT NOT TOO LONG BECAUSE THE EXHAUST FUMES MADE HIM D'ZZY...



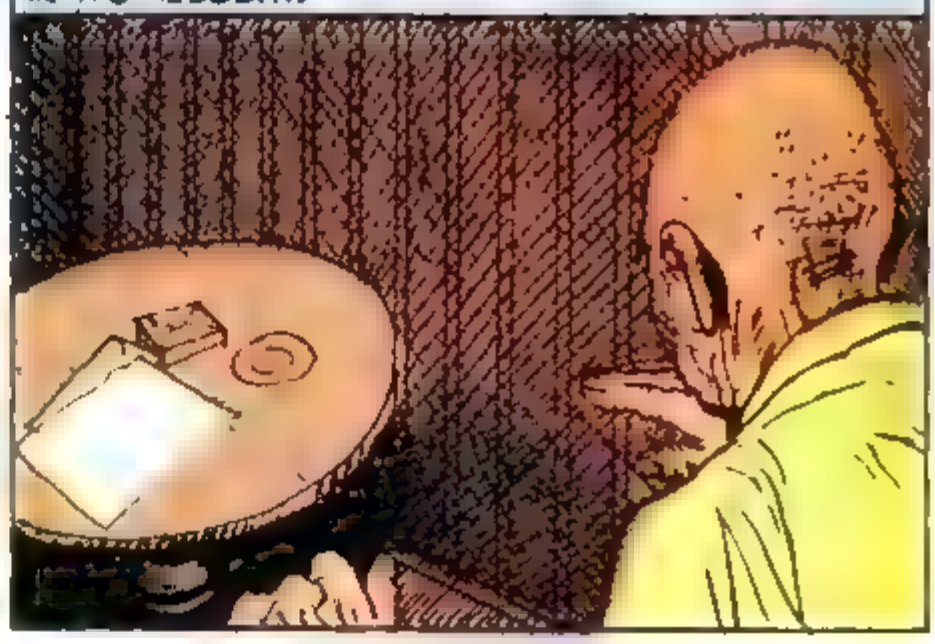
ONE DAY TWO SUMMERS AGO HE HAD LOOKED UP FROM HIS EASY CHAIR TO FIND A PUERTO RICAN BOY CLIMBING THROUGH HIS WINDOW. HE HAD NOT BEEN FRIGHTENED BECAUSE HE KNEW HE HAD NOTHING WORTH STEALING. THE BOY HAD SLICK BLACK HAIR, OLIVE SKIN AND A THICK ACCENT. HE SAID: *"HEY OL' MAN, YOU ALL ALONE HERE? LISTEN, THE ANGELS IS SICK OF THIS TENEMENT SHIT AND WE GONNA BURN THIS PLACE DOWN. YOU DIG IT? SEE, IF IT BURNS DOWN THE CITY GOTTA BUILD A NEW ONE, YOU HIP?"*

"ME AND THE ANGELS GONNA DO IT, MAN BUT DON'T WORRY 'CAUSE WE GONNA ALERT EVERYBODY IN THE BUILDING, RIGHT? HANG LOOSE, OL' MAN!" HE HAD WANTED TO ASK THE BOY WHAT AN "ANGEL" WAS BUT THE BOY LOOKED ANXIOUS TO LEAVE AND SLIPPED BACK OUT THE WINDOW AND HE NEVER SAW HIM AGAIN. THE BUILDING HAD NEVER BEEN SET AFIRE...

IT WAS PAST ONE NOW AND IT LOOKED LIKE THE FAT, PIMPLY GIRL WASN'T COMING WITH THE GROCERIES. HE WOULD HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL EVENING WHEN THE ARTHRITIS USUALLY SUBSIDED, THEN GO DOWN TO HOLSUN'S MARKET. BUT EVEN IF HE DIDN'T EAT TODAY IT WOULDN'T BE THE FIRST TIME. HE WOULDN'T DIE. NOT YET. HIS EYES DRIFTED ACROSS THE ROOM AND LIGHTED ON THE TABLE WHERE THE PHONE USED TO BE. OF ALL THE THINGS HE USED TO OWN HE MISSED THE PHONE THE MOST...

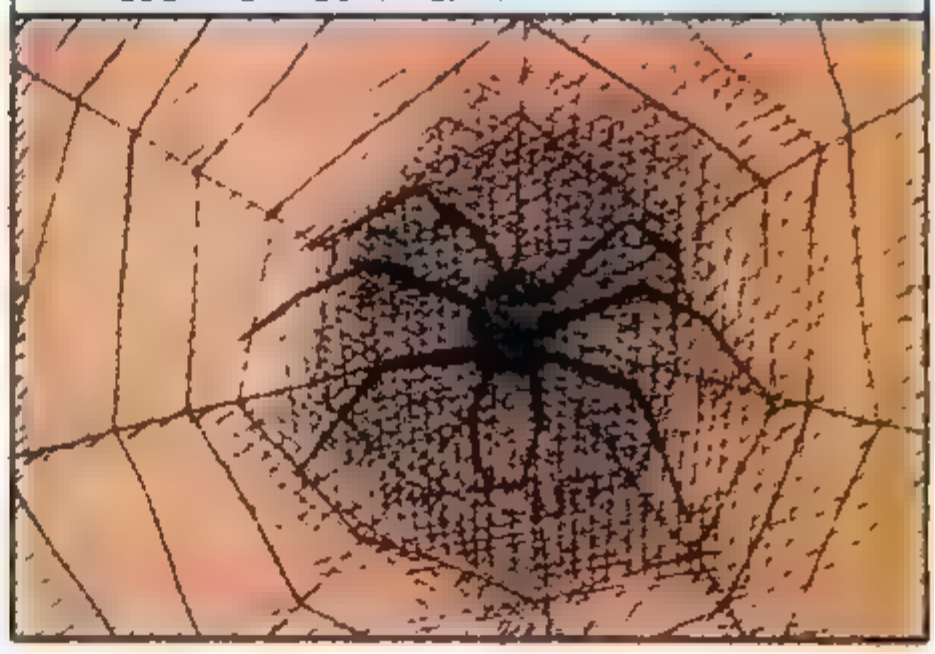
IT HAD NOT ONLY BEEN A DIRECT LINE TO THE POLICE STATION, BUT HE USED TO PRETEND THAT IT WOULD RING AND THAT BARRY WOULD BE ON THE OTHER END. BARRY HAD ONLY CALLED ONCE IN THE TEN YEARS HE'D OWNED THE PHONE BUT HE HAD NEVER STOPPED HOPING. THAT ONE TIME BARRY HAD CALLED, HE'D TALKED FOR ONLY THREE MINUTES AND ASKED TO BORROW TWENTY DOLLARS. HE HAD TOLD BARRY THAT HE DIDN'T HAVE EVEN FIVE DOLLARS BUT THAT IT HAD BEEN NICE TALKING WITH HIM AND WOULD HE PLEASE CALL AGAIN SOON? BARRY HADN'T, AND THE PHONE COMPANY TOOK AWAY HIS PHONE A MONTH LATER...

HE STARED AT THE EMPTY TABLE A LONG TIME AND IT SEEMED THAT HE MIGHT HAVE DRIFTED OFF A MOMENT...HE WASN'T SURE...AND THAT'S WHEN HE FIRST NOTICED THE SPIDER'S WEB. IT WAS STRUNG NEATLY AND EFFICIENTLY BETWEEN THE TABLE AND THE WALL AND HE GRUNTED AND SCOWLED AND STOOPED WITH THE RESOLVE TO REMOVE IT. HE WAS OLD AND WEAK BUT HE WOULD NOT HAVE COBWEBS IN HIS HOUSE!...

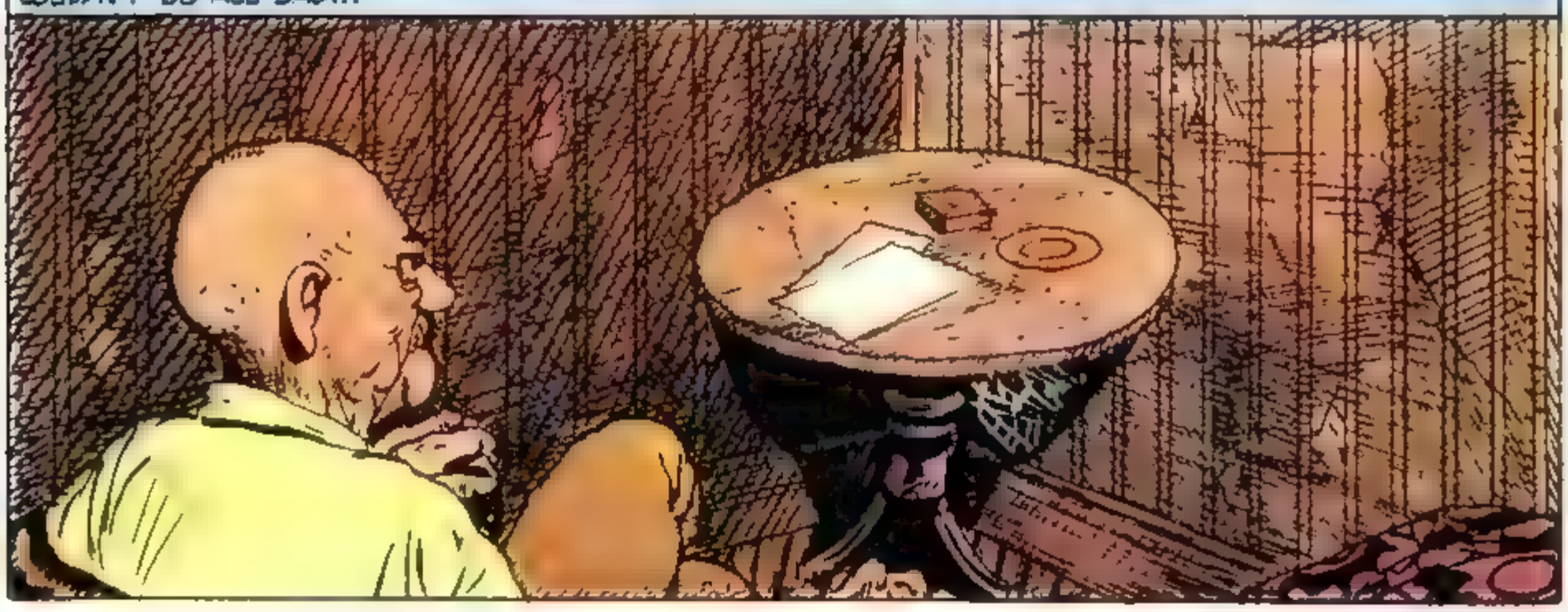


HE GRABBED UP THE BROOM LEANING AGAINST THE WALL AND PREPARED TO KNOCK AWAY THE OFFENDING WEB. BUT THEN HE SAW A CURIOUS THING: HANGING HERE AND THERE IN THE SILKEN STRANDS WERE THE DRY, EMPTY HUSKS OF SEVERAL ONCE FAT ROACHES, DANGLING LIKE GRIM TROPHIES FROM THE HUNTER'S STICKY MANTLE. HE STAYED HIS HAND FROM WIELDING THE BROOM AND BENT CLOSER...

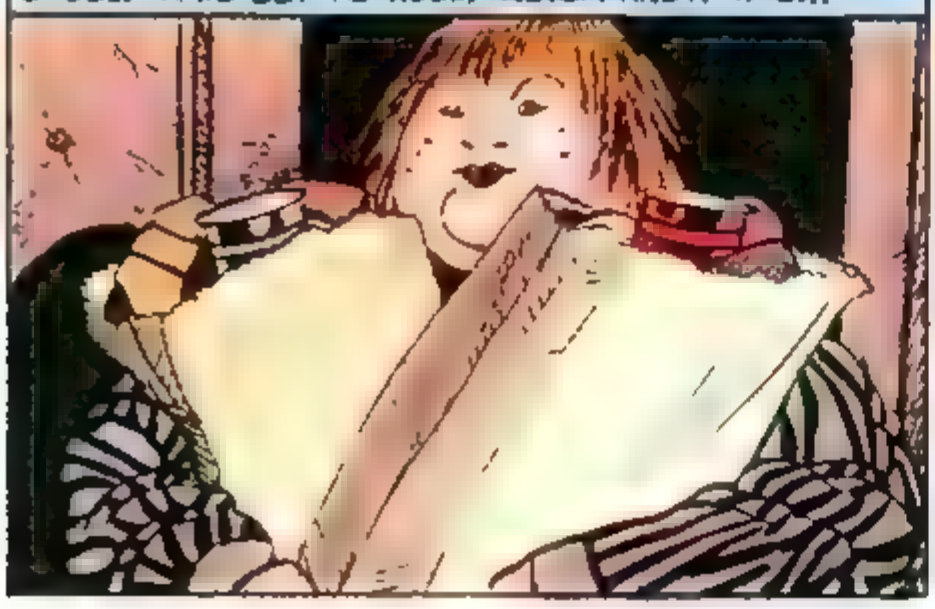
HIGH ON THE SHIMMERING THREADS, TUCKED AWAY SAFELY IN A CONICAL TUNNEL WAS THE HUNTER, ITS BLACK, GLOSSY BODY HANGING LIKE AN EBON EGG IN SILENT, WATCHFUL RETREAT, ONE STALK-LIKE LEG GENTLY TOUCHING THE KEY THREAD THAT WOULD ALERT IT SHOULD ANYTHING INTERESTING BLUNDER INTO THE CUNNINGLY CONSTRUCTED SNARE. THE OLD MAN BECAME FASCINATED..



HE HAD NEVER LOOKED CLOSELY AT A SPIDER WEB BEFORE. THERE IN THE FADING AFTERNOON LIGHT ITS DARK CABLES GLISTENED LIKE SPUN GOLD ALL THE DELICATE CRAFTSMANSHIP BROUGHT TO DAZZLING LIFE. HE FOUND HIMSELF STARING FOR SEVERAL MINUTES INTRIGUED BY THE COMPLEX NEAR BEAUTY, UNTIL HIS LEFT KNEE ACHED TERRIBLY AND HE WAS FORCED TO SIT DOWN AGAIN. EVEN THEN HE WATCHED FOR NEARLY AN HOUR, HOPING THAT THE BUILDER MIGHT CLIMB DOWN INTO FULL VIEW. ANYTHING THAT KILLED ROACHES, HE REASONED, COULDN'T BE ALL BAD...

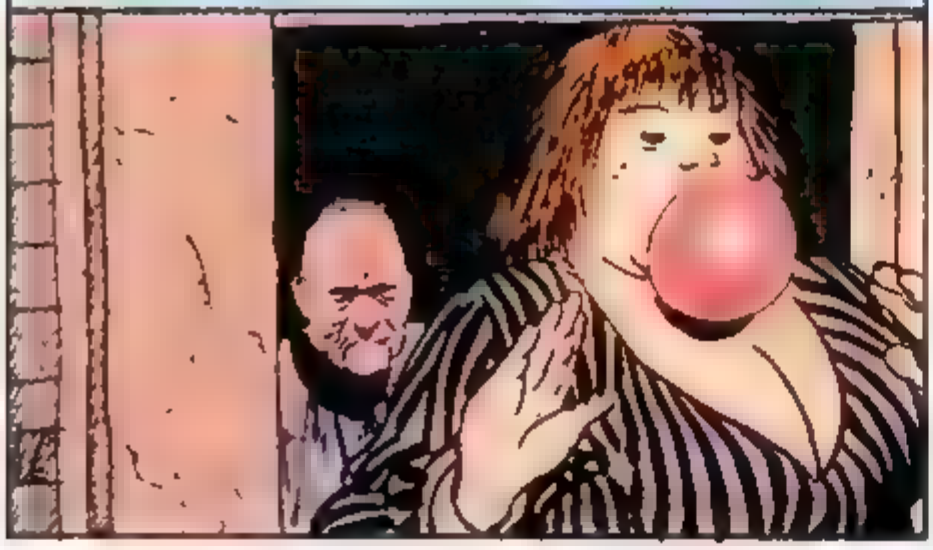


A RAP AT THE DOOR BROKE HIS REVERIE. THERE WAS A MUFFLED, FAMILIAR VOICE THEN THE KNOB TWISTED AND THE FAT PIMPLY GIRL WALKED IN WITH A SINGLE GROCERY SACK IN HER ARMS. SHE SET THE BAG ON THE EMPTY PHONE TABLE AND STUCK OUT HER HAND. HE FUMBLED WILDLY AT HIS POCKETS FOR THE MONEY, THEN MOTIONED TOWARD THE BUREAU AND TOLD HER TO TAKE WHATEVER HE OWED HER. THE FAT, PIMPLY GIRL NAMED SHARON TOOK A DOLLAR MORE THAN SHE SHOULD HAVE BUT HE WOULD NEVER KNOW THIS...



EVERY DAY SHE BROUGHT THE SAME THING: A SIX-PACK OF PEPSIS, THREE CANS OF CAMPBELL'S VEGETABLE SOUP, A DOLLARS WORTH OF FRUIT (HER CHOICE) AND BREAD AND SOAP IF HE NEEDED IT. IT WAS WHAT HE LIVED OFF OF. HE NEVER COOKED MORE THAN HE COULD EAT AT ONE SETTING BECAUSE THE ROACHES WOULD GET INTO IT. IF THE WELFARE CHECK WAS LATE AND HE COULD NOT PAY HER RIGHT THEN, SHE COMPLAINED BUT ALWAYS CAME BACK ANYWAY. HE COULD NOT REMEMBER HER NAME OR WHERE SHE LIVED OR WHY SHE DID THIS FOR HIM .. IT SEEMED SHE ALWAYS HAD...

USUALLY SHE STUFFED THE MONEY IN HER JEANS AND CLATTERED BACK DOWN THE HALL STAIRS IN A GREAT HURRY SLAMMING THE DOOR LOUDLY BEHIND HER. TODAY SHE HUNG AROUND HIS ROOM AWHILE HOOKING HER THUMBS IN HER JEAN LOOPS AND STARING OUT THE GRIMY WINDOW, SMACKING AND POPPING PINK BUBBLE GUM. HE SAT IN THE CHAIR AND GAZED ABSENTLY AT HER FAT RUMP AND TRIED TO GUESS HER AGE. HE COULD NOT TELL HOW OLD YOUNG PEOPLE WERE ANYMORE. SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN EIGHTEEN OR TWELVE...



SHE STRETCHED HER ARMS HIGH IN THE AIR AND GRUNTED. *"IT'S GONNA RAIN,"* SHE SAID. SHE SPOKE IT IN A DULL MONOTONE. THE DIRTY GRAY SWEATSHIRT RODE UP ON HER BACK WHEN SHE STRETCHED AND HE COULD SEE THE WHITE ROLL OF FLESH ABOVE THE JEAN TOPS FOR A MOMENT; THERE WERE PIMPLES EVEN HERE. HE FELT SUDDENLY UNCOMFORTABLE. THE FAT GIRL HAD NEVER STAYED THIS LONG BEFORE AND HE'D NEVER HAD TO ENGAGE IN CONVERSATION WITH HER. HE SENSED SHE WANTED SOMETHING BUT HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT...

THE ROOM SMELLED OF DOUBLE BUBBLE. HE STARTED TO SAY, *I FOUND A BEAUTIFUL SPIDER WEB*, BUT REALIZED IT WOULD SOUND STUPID TO HER SO HE JUST STARED AT HER AND RUBBED HIS DARK-SPOTTED KNUCKLES. AT LAST SHE SAID, *"I BRUNG PEARS THIS TIME."* HE NODDED, NOT KNOWING WHAT ELSE TO DO. STILL SHE WOULD NOT LEAVE. WHAT DID SHE WANT? *"I THINK I'M FLUNKING ALGEBRA,"* SHE SAID. HE NODDED. SHE STARED BACK. THEN SHE LOOKED AROUND THE ROOM ONCE, POPPED A BUBBLE, SAID, *"SEE YOU,"* AND SKIPPED DOWN THE STAIRS...

IT WAS GETTING LATE SO HE FIRST TURNED ON THE LIGHT, THEN PUT THE GROCERIES IN THE BREAD BOX NEXT TO THE HOT PLATE. HE ATE ONE OF THE PEARS AND PUT ON SOME WATER FOR TEA. HE WOULD SAVE THE FIRST PEPSI UNTIL TOMORROW. THEY WERE GETTING EXPENSIVE. WHILE HE WAS DOING THIS, A ROACH CRAWLED LAZILY, ARROGANTLY UP THE WALL IN BACK OF THE BREAD BOX. HE STARTED TO IGNORE IT, THEN THOUGHT OF SOMETHING ..

HE PICKED UP A GLASS AND JABBED IT AT THE NEST TRAPPING IT AGAINST THE WALL. THEN HE SLID A PIECE OF NEWSPAPER BETWEEN THE WALL AND THE GLASS AND CARRIED THE GLASS TO THE PHONE TABLE. HE BENT DOWN WITH A WINCE AND GAZED AT THE VICIOUS LITTLE HIGH ON THE SILKEN WEB. HE REMOVED THE NEWSPAPER AND SHOOK THE GLASS AT THE WEB.

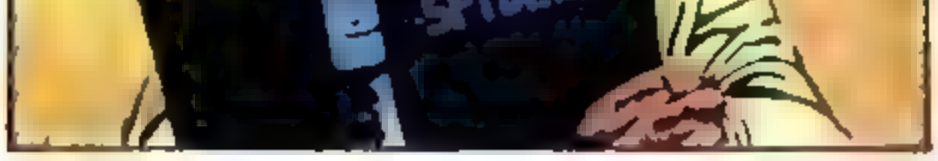
THE MOMENT THE ROACH HIT THE SILK THE CABLES AND SET UP A RIPPLE OF VIBRATIONS. THERE WAS A MOVEMENT IN THE TUNNEL AND THE PARA SPIDER-LEGGED OWNER SHOT OUT IN A BLUR. IT HESITATED A MOMENT JUST IN FRONT OF THE STRUGGLING ROACH AND HE COULD SEE ALL OF ITS BLACK BRISTLING BODY--THEN IT POUNCED. HE COULD NOT SEE THE TINY FANGS SINKING INTO THE ROACH'S CARAPACE BUT HE COULD DETECT THE SUDDEN THRASHING OF THE ROACH'S LEGS AND THEN THE GRADUAL SLOWING AS IT PADDLED MINDLESSLY AT THE AIR. BODY CHOKED WITH NUMBING POISON..

AFTER A TIME THE SPIDER MOVED ITS GLOSSY ABDOMEN OVER THE ROACH'S PARALYZED BODY AND BEGAN A RHYTHMIC SPINNING MOTION WITH ITS LEGS, TURNING THE ROACH OVER AND OVER BEFORE IT. THE ROACH BEGAN TO CHANGE COLOR--A LIGHT GREY--AND THEN HE REALIZED IT WAS BEING BOUND IN A TIGHT SHEATH OF WEBBING. THE ROACH HAVING BEEN SAFELY BOUND, THE SPIDER MOVED OVER IT ONCE MORE AND BEGAN LEISURELY DRAINING ITS JUICES.

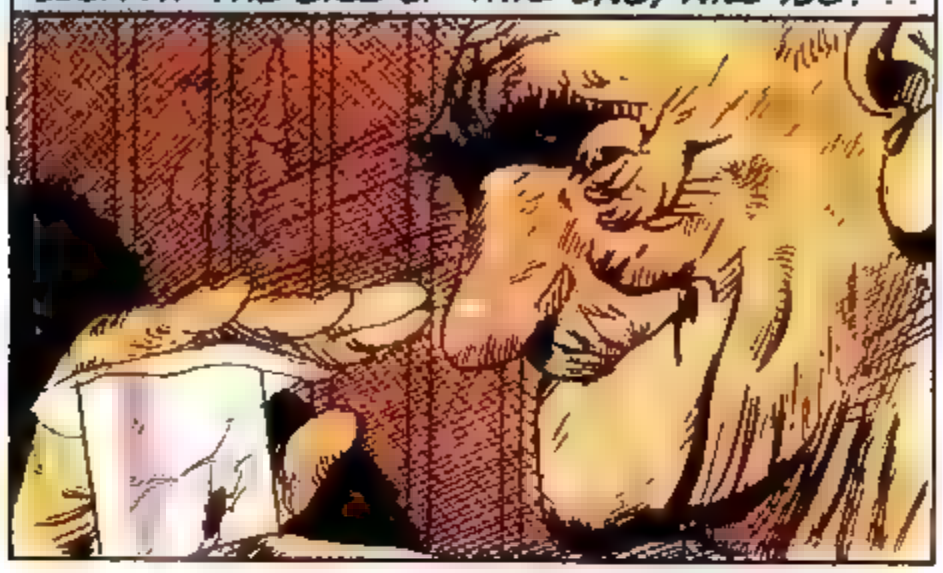
HIS MOUTH FELL OPEN AND HE STIRRED BACK TO LIFE. HE PUT PLATE PREPARED HIS TEA AND PULLED THE SMALL WOODEN CHAIR OVER TO THE PHONE TABLE. HE SAT FOR OVER AN HOUR WATCHING THE SPIDER DRINK ROACH JUICE WHILE HE DRANK TEA. WHEN THE SPIDER AT LAST CLIMBED UP TO ITS SILKEN PERCH, BLOATED AND SATED, THE OLD MAN SMILED AT IT. "ALL FULL?" HE SAID...

HE COULD HARDLY SLEEP THAT NIGHT. HE COULDN'T WAIT TO GET TO THE LIBRARY THE NEXT MORNING AND CHECK OUT A BOOK ON SPIDERS. IT HAD BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE HE HAD BEEN EXCITED ABOUT SOMETHING AND HE TOLD HIMSELF IT WAS SILLY TO BE EXCITED ABOUT A SPIDER--THAT HE WAS A SENILE OLD MAN--BUT HE WENT ON BEING EXCITED ANYWAY. HE THOUGHT ABOUT THROWING ANOTHER ROACH INTO THE WEB BUT HE DIDN'T WANT TO DISTURB THE SPIDER'S SLEEP..

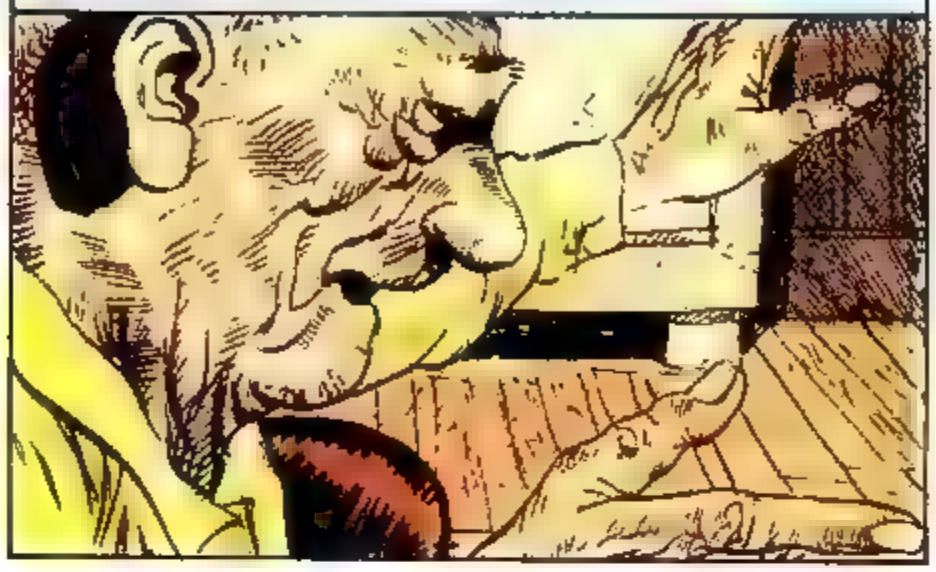
THE NEXT DAY WAS THE BEST HE COULD REMEMBER IN YEARS. THE ARTHRITIS WAS BETTER AND HE WENT TO THE LIBRARY AND BROUGHT HOME A BOOK ON SPIDERS. HE READ IT COVER TO COVER. HE LEARNED THAT SPIDERS WERE NOT INSECTS AT ALL BUT SOMETHING FROM A FAMILY CALLED *ARACHNIDA*. HE SAW PICTURES OF WOLF SPIDERS, DWARF SPIDERS, WATER SPIDERS AND JUMPING SPIDERS BUT HE COULD NOT FIND AN ILLUSTRATION THAT MATCHED THE SPIDER LIVING UNDER THE PHONE TABLE. SEVERAL PAGES WERE RIPPED OUT OF THE BOOK AND HE DECIDED HIS SPIDER MUST HAVE BEEN ON ONE OF THESE STILL. THE BOOK WAS FASCINATING..



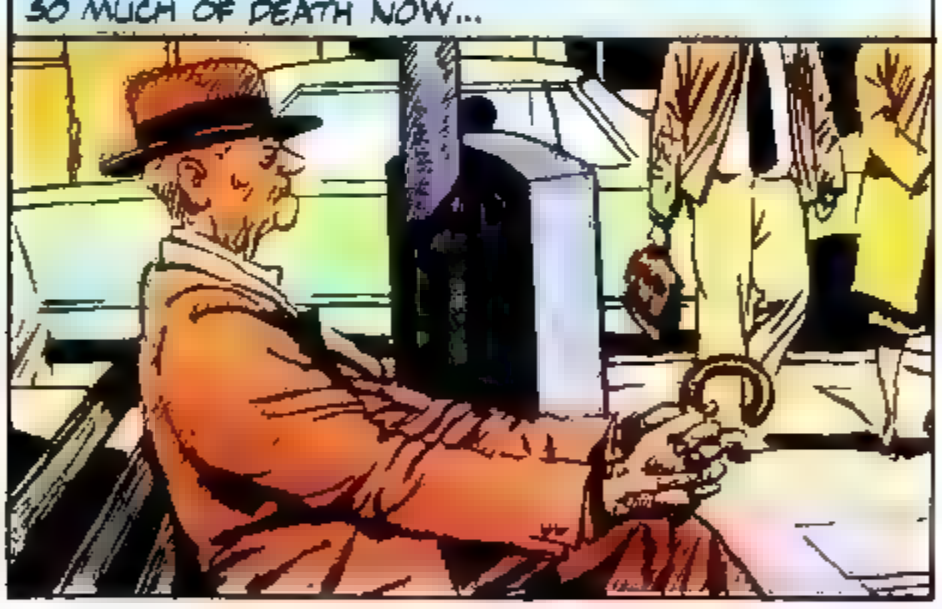
HE BEGAN CATCHING ROACHES REGULARLY FOR THE SPIDER AND TOSSING THEM INTO THE WEB. SOON THERE WERE SO MANY INSECT CORPSES IN THE DELICATE FRAMEWORK, THE SPIDER BEGAN DROPPING THEM TO THE FLOOR IN A NEAT PILE. THEY WERE, IN TURN, SWEPT UP WITH THE BROOM. THE AREA AROUND THE SPIDER'S WEB WAS KEPT IMMACULATE AND THE SPIDER WAS NEVER TEASED OR DISTURBED. HE DID BEGIN TO TALK TO THE SPIDER, HOWEVER. USUALLY IT WAS WHEN HE WAS FEEDING IT. *"HERE'S A NICE FAT ONE,"* HE WOULD SAY, OR: *"LOOK AT THE SIZE OF THIS ONE, WILL YOU?"*.



SOMETIMES HE WOULD SAY GOOD MORNING TO THE SPIDER WHEN HE AWOKE AND HE FOUND HIMSELF GREETING IT WHEN HE CAME IN FROM HIS WALKS. USUALLY, HE WOULD JUST SIT IN THE EASY CHAIR DURING THE WARM EVENINGS AND TELL THE SPIDER WHATEVER WAS ON HIS MIND. HE DISCOVERED THAT ONCE HE'D BEGUN, HE ENJOYED TALKING OUT LOUD AND HE DID IT SO WITHOUT EMBARRASSMENT. HE ALSO DISCOVERED HE HAD A GREAT MANY THINGS TO SAY, MOSTLY ABOUT HIS YOUTH AND A GIRL HE HAD ONCE KNOWN...



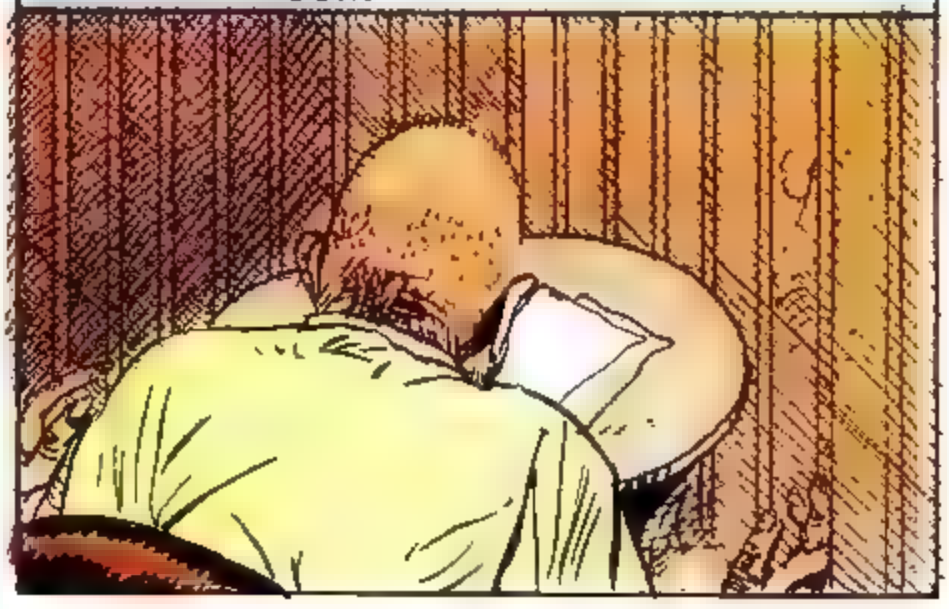
IF THE SPIDER OBJECTED TO THE LENGTHY CONVERSATIONS IT NEVER SHOWED IT. IT SIMPLY SAT SNUGLY AND SAFELY IN ITS SILVERY TUNNEL, WAITING MOTIONLESS FOR SOMETHING TO FALL INTO THE WEB. THE DAYS PASSED.. THE SUMMER WANED. THE TWO ATE AND SLEPT AND SAT IN THE APARTMENT. THE FAT, PIMPLY GIRL DELIVERED THE GROCERIES AND HE PAID HER AND TOOK HIS WALKS AND SAT IN THE BENCH OUTSIDE AND FED AND TALKED TO THE SPIDER. HE DID NOT THINK SO MUCH OF DEATH NOW...



THEN ONE MORNING HE AWOKE EARLIER THAN USUAL WITH A COLD BREEZE ACROSS HIS CHEST. HE CLOSED THE WINDOW AND STARTED TO FETCH ANOTHER BLANKET FOR THE BED WHEN HE SUDDENLY REMEMBERED SOMETHING THE BOOK HAD SAID ABOUT THE COLD. HE RUSHED TO THE WEB AND FOUND THE SPIDER CURLED IN A TIGHT BLACK BALL. HIS HEART LEAPED IN HIS CHEST...

HE TURNED ON THE LIGHT, FOUND TWO FAT ROACHES AND DROPPED THEM INTO THE WEB. HE LOOKED ANXIOUSLY AT THE SPIDER BUT IT DID NOT MOVE. HE PACED AND MUMBLED AND RUNG HIS HANDS. THE WOOD FLOOR WAS COLD ON HIS BARE FEET AND HE HAD TO PUT HIS SHOES ON. HE HAD NEVER BEEN SO UPSET IN HIS LIFE...

HE PULLED HIS CHAIR CLOSE TO THE WEB AND GAZED WORRIEDLY AT THE SPIDER AND TALKED TO IT IN A SOOTHING VOICE, ENCOURAGING IT TO MOVE. THE SPIDER REMAINED CURLED INTO ITSELF. BY NOON THE ROOM HAD WARMED CONSIDERABLY AND THE SPIDER AT LAST FLEXED ITS DARK LEGS LABORIOUSLY. BUT IT WOULD NOT EAT. HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY IT WAS NOT HUNGRY. *"DO YOU WANT TO MAKE YOURSELF SICK?"* HE ASKED IT. BUT IT JUST SAT MOTIONLESS...



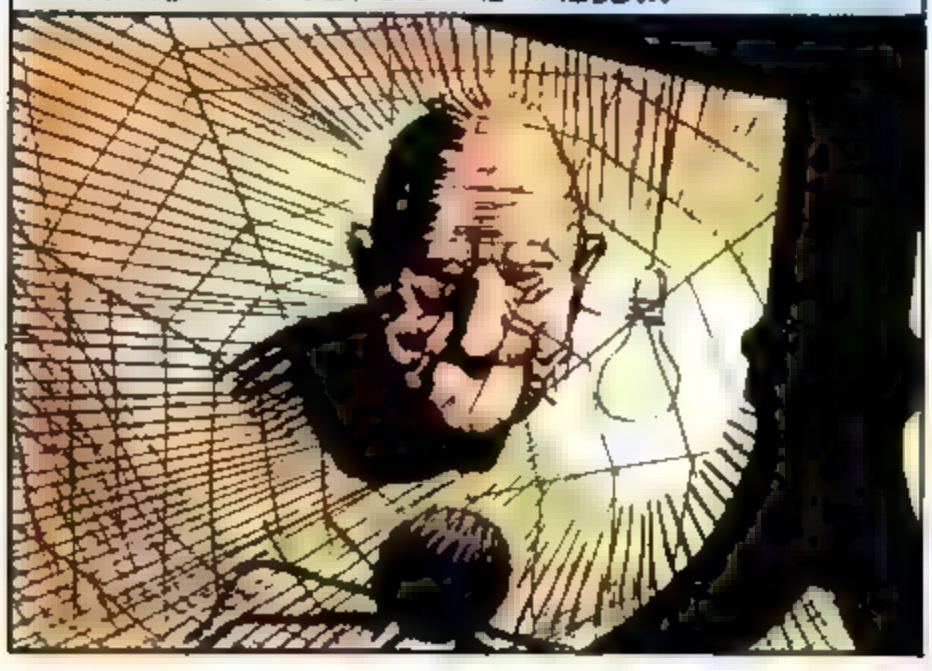
HE DID NOT EAT HIMSELF ALL DAY. BY EVENING THE APARTMENT BEGAN TO GROW COOL AGAIN. ONCE MORE THE SPIDER DREW UP ITS LEGS AND REMAINED UNMOVING NO MATTER HOW MANY ROACHES WERE DROPPED INTO THE WEB. THE FLOOR TURNED ICY AGAIN AND HE BANGED ON THE PIPE AND CALLED FROM THE TOP OF THE STAIRS FOR MRS. MENDEZ TO SEND UP MORE HEAT. SHE REPLIED THAT A PIPE WAS BROKEN SOMEWHERE ..

HE PACED AND SHOOK HIS HEAD AND CAST BALEFUL GLANCES AT THE MOTIONLESS WEB. BY MIDNIGHT THE ROOM WAS LIKE A FOOT LOCKER. HE BUNDLED UP IN HIS ONLY WINTER COAT AND KEPT WARM BY PACING, THOUGH HIS LEFT LEG WAS ACHING PAINFULLY. HE FOUND THAT A SHARP BREEZE WAS POURING THROUGH THE ANCIENT WINDOW FRAME AND HE TOOK THE BLANKET FROM THE BED AND STUFFED IT INTO THE CRACKS. HE SLEPT IN THE CHAIR THAT NIGHT BESIDE THE SPIDER ..

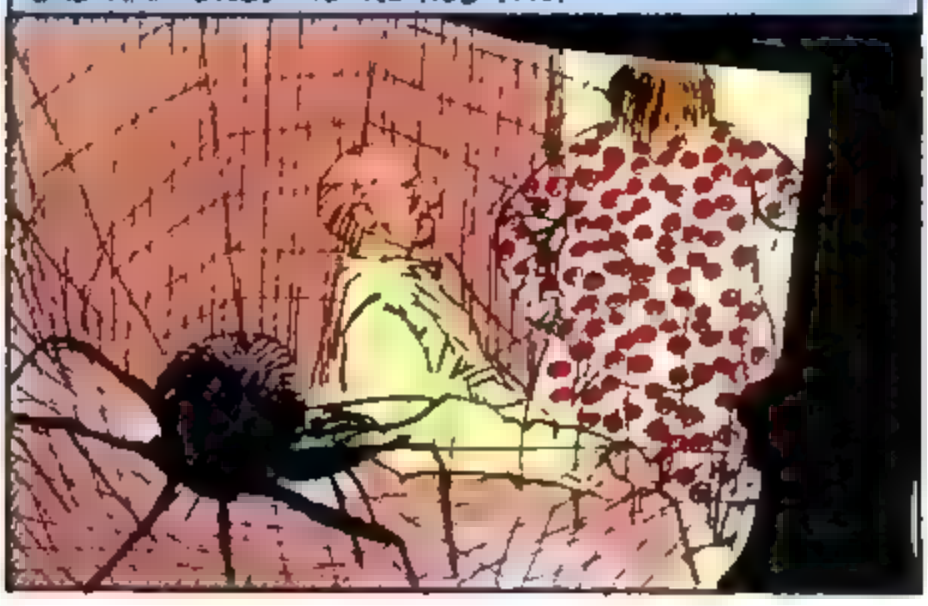
HE AWOKE TO THE SOUND OF TRAFFIC IN THE STREET AND THE BRIGHT GLARE OF SUNLIGHT. HE MOVED IMMEDIATELY TO THE WEB AND PEERED INTO IT. AT FIRST IT APPEARED EMPTY AND HE THOUGHT THE SPIDER HAD MOVED TO A WARMER APARTMENT THEN HE FOUND IT AT LAST, HUDDLED TOGETHER LIKE A BLACK WRINKLED PEA AT THE HIGHEST POINT OF THE FUNNEL AS IF SEEKING THE FARAWAY WARMTH OF THE SUN. HE BIT HIS LIP AND HELD HIS HANDS UP TO THE BARE ELECTRIC BULB TO WARM THEM. INSTANTLY, HE CRIED OUT EXCITEDLY...

HE PULLED THE WOODEN CHAIR BENEATH THE DANGLING LIGHT CORD AND BEGAN JERKING THE CORD FROM THE PLASTER-FLAKING CEILING WHERE SOMEONE HAD STAPLED IT HASTILY. HE ALMOST FELL TWICE AND HE KNEW THAT IF HE DID HE WOULD NEVER GET UP. WHEN HE HAD ENOUGH LENGTH OF CORD, HE RECENTERED IT OVER THE PHONE TABLE AND DROPPED IT TO JUST A FEW FEET ABOVE THE WEB, TAPING IT BACK TO THE CEILING WITH MASKING TAPE...

THEN, HE SAT DOWN ON THE CHAIR AND WATCHED THE WEB EAGERLY. FOR AN HOUR NOTHING HAPPENED. THEN, AROUND TEN, THE SPIDER BEGAN UNSTIFFENING HIS LEGS IN SLOW, EXAGERATED MOVEMENTS. THE OLD MAN SMILED. HE GOT UP AND BEGAN SEARCHING FOR A FRESH ROACH. THE COLD AND LIGHT HAD DRIVEN THEM INTO THE WALLS SO HE HAD TO LEAVE FOOD OUT ON THE TABLE...



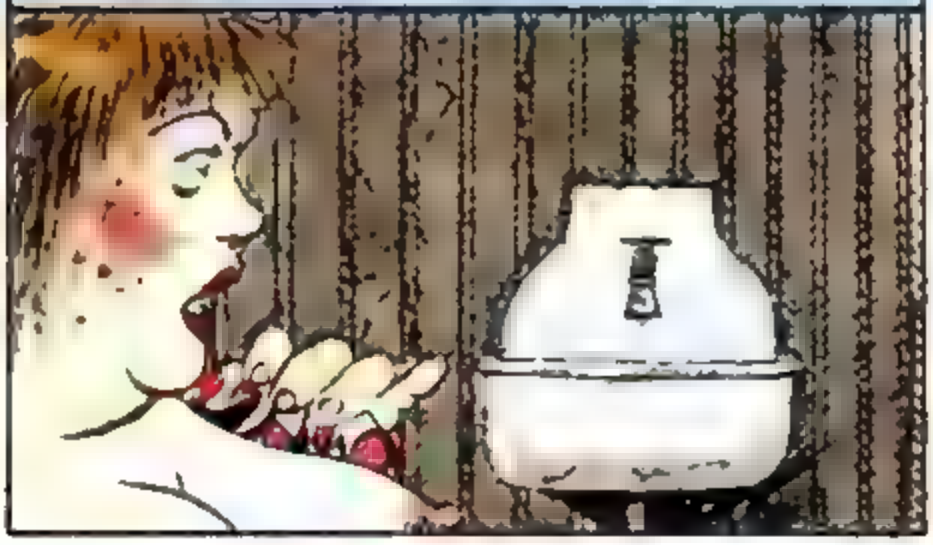
HE CAUGHT A LARGE FAT ONE AT LAST AND DROPPED IT INTO THE WEB. THE SPIDER DID NOT HESITATE AND HE WATCHED LAUGHING AS IT FED. THERE WAS A RAPPING ON THE DOOR AND THE FAT PIMPLY GIRL CAME IN WITH AN ARMFUL OF GROCERIES. SHE SET THEM ATOP THE PHONE TABLE. THEN STOOD LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW WITH HER HANDS ON HER HIPS, AND HE SAT ACROSS THE ROOM AWAY FROM THE WEB SO SHE WOULD NOT BOTHER THE SPIDER IF SHE HAPPENED TO NOTICE IT...



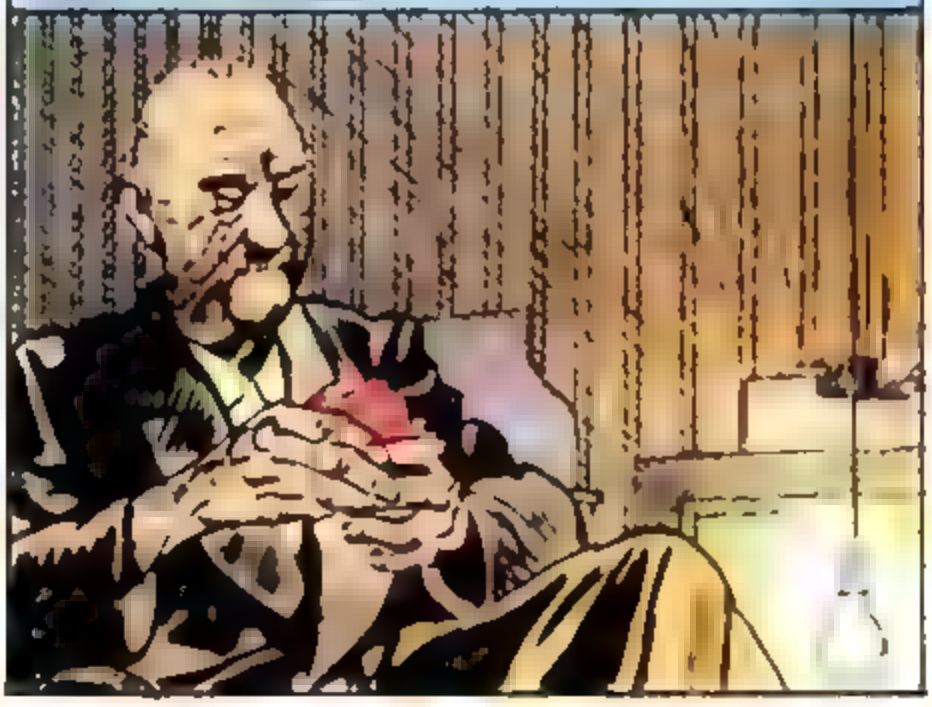
THE FAT PIMPLY GIRL NAMED SHARON STOOD A LONG TIME LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW AT THE GRAY BUILDINGS ACROSS THE STREET. THERE WAS SOMETHING DIFFERENT ABOUT HER TODAY BUT HE COULD NOT TELL WHAT AT FIRST. THEN, HE REALIZED SHE WAS WEARING A DRESS INSTEAD OF JEANS AND SHE WASN'T CHEWING GUM. SHE JUST STOOD LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW QUIETLY AND HE WISHED SHE WOULD LEAVE SO HE COULD CHECK ON THE SPIDER...

FINALLY SHE TURNED AROUND TO HIM AND PARKED HER LARGE BUTTOCKS AGAINST THE WINDOW SILL. SHE LOOKED STRAIGHT AT HIM AND THERE WAS A QUEER EXPRESSION ON HER FACE. ABRUPTLY HE REALIZED THAT SHE HAD MADE A CLUMSY ATTEMPT TO APPLY MAKE-UP TO HER MOON-FACE. THERE WAS A DETERMINED ALMOST ANGRY LOOK IN HER EYES. THEN SHE BLURTED IT OUT SUDDENLY. "I CAN HAVE ANY BOY AT SCHOOL!" HE STARED BACK AT HER STUPIDLY.

A MUSCLE TWITCHED ON HER CHUBBY CHEEK. "I'M NOT SO UGLY," SHE SAID, VOICE TREMBLING WITH DEFIANCE. SHE GRABBED THE BODICE OF HER DRESS SUDDENLY AND TORE IT OPEN. "LOOK AT ME! IT MIGHT AS WELL BE YOU!" HE STARED IN DULL SURPRISE AT THE PALE LUMPY GLOBES OF HER BREASTS DOTTED HERE AND THERE WITH PIMPLES. THE HUMS SUSPENDED IN THE LITTLE ROOM. THEN A SOB BROKE IN HER THROAT AND SHE RAN FROM THE ROOM, DOWN THE CHATTERING STAIRS WITHOUT CLOSING THE DOOR OR GETTING HER MONEY.



HE SAT BLINKING A MOMENT THEN RUSHED BACK TO THE SPIDER. IT WAS EATING LEISURELY IN THE CENTER OF THE WEB AND HE SMILED AND WATCHED IT AWHILE. THEN HE MADE HIMSELF SOME TEA AND ATE ONE OF THE APPLES IN THE GROCERY SACK. HE LEFT THE LIGHT BULB ON ALL NIGHT...

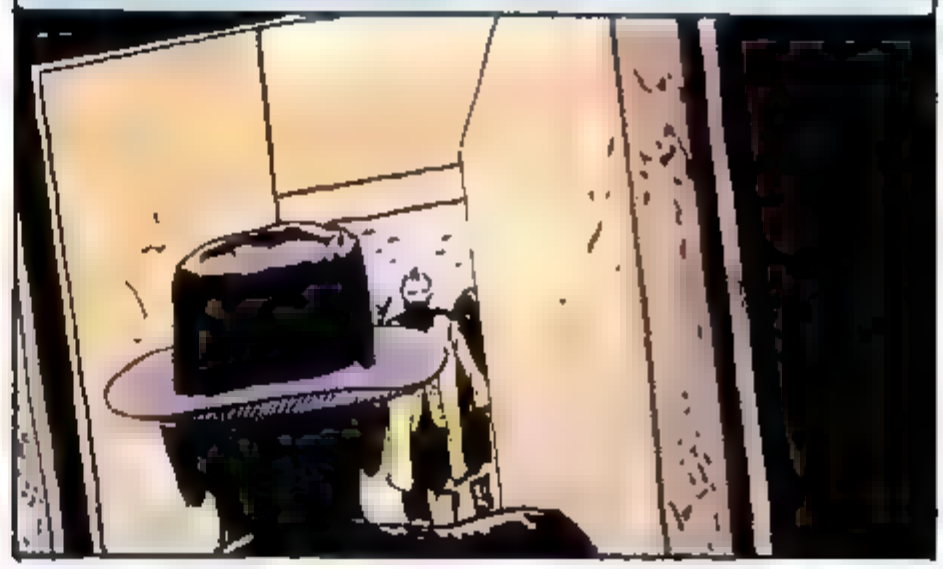


THE NEXT MORNING HE WENT BACK TO THE LIBRARY TO RETURN THE BOOK AND BOUGHT A SPARE LIGHT BULB AT HOLSUN'S MARKET. HIS ARTHRITIS WAS ACTING UP AGAIN AND IT WAS A PAINFUL EFFORT TO CLIMB THE LONG FLIGHT OF STAIRS TO HIS ROOM ONCE MORE. WHEN HE OPENED THE DOOR HE CRIED OUT IN SURPRISE. BARRY WAS SITTING IN HIS EASY CHAIR AND A PREGNANT GIRL WAS MOVING ABOUT THE ROOM WITH A DUST CLOTH...

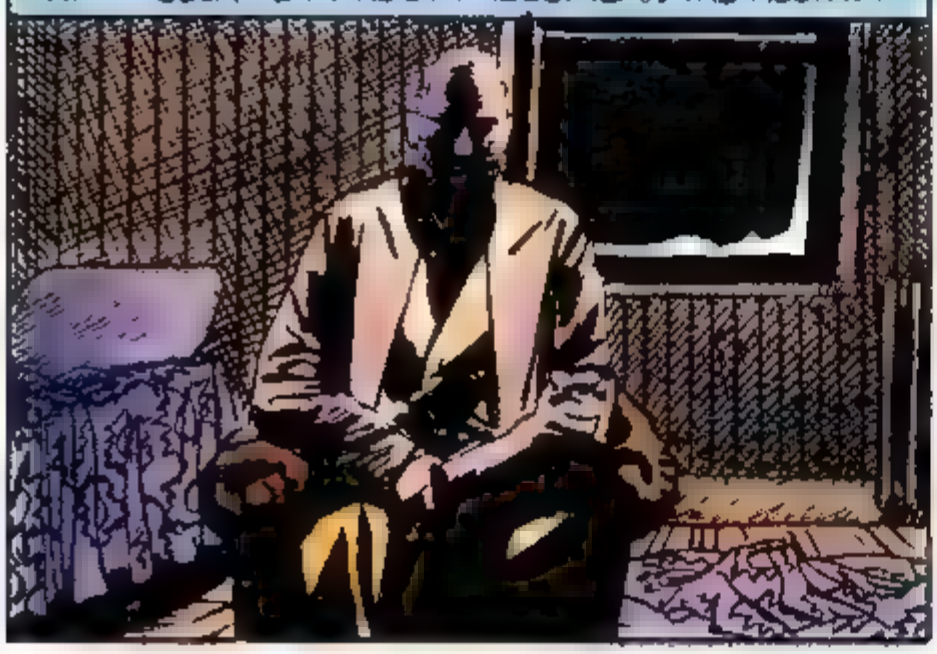
BARRY JUMPED UP WITH A BIG GRIN, CLAPPING HIM ON THE BACK AND TOLD HIM HOW GREAT HE LOOKED AND HOW GLAD HE WAS TO SEE HIM AND WHY HADN'T HE WRITTEN? HE INTRODUCED HIS WIFE ANNE AND EXPLAINED THAT THE BABY WAS DUE SOON AND WHAT WAS THE CHANCE OF BORROWING A FEW BUCKS TO BUY THE KID A PRESENT? ANNE STOOD SHYLY BEHIND BARRY LIKE A PRETTY HORSE AND HOPED HE DIDN'T MIND THAT SHE'D TIDIED UP A BIT FOR HIM ON ACCOUNT OF THAT WAS THE LEAST THEY COULD DO FOR HIM...

HIS EYES FELL IN SHOCKED AMAZEMENT OVER THE NEATLY GROOMED ROOM, THE CLEANED DISHES, THE WASHED WINDOW, THE EMPTIED GARBAGE, THE ***SWEPT FLOOR***... HE CRIED OUT, FLINGING HIS ARMS UP, HIS VOICE LIKE THE CROAK OF A STUCK FROG. THE PHONE TABLE WAS DUSTED AND OILED. THE SPIDER'S WEB WAS GONE...

HE SCREAMED AT THEM. HE SHOUTED AND STUMBLED ABOUT THE ROOM AND THREW A BOOK AND FELT WARM TEARS ON HIS CHEEKS. BARRY BACKED AWAY IN CONFUSED ANGER AND THE PREGNANT GIRL HID BEHIND HIM AND PULLED AT HIS SHIRT WITH LITTLE PINK MOUSE HANDS UNTIL SHE'D MANAGED TO PULL HIM CLEAR OUT THE DOOR AND DOWN THE STAIRS. THE LAST THING BARRY YELLED UP FROM THE ECHOING STAIRWELL WAS: "***CRAZY OLD BASTARD!***" AND IT SEEMED TO RING FOREVER IN HIS EARS, LONG AFTER HE'D SETTLED TREMBLING INTO THE EASY CHAIR...

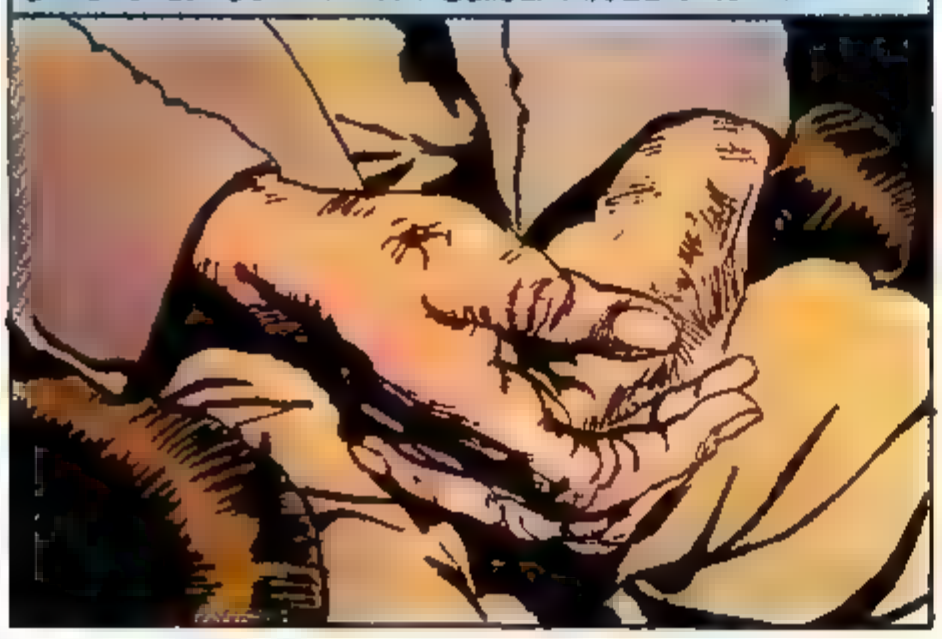


HE SAT IN THE CHAIR ALL THE REST OF THAT DAY AND STARED AT THE EMPTY SPACE WHERE THE WEB HAD BEEN. WHEN NIGHT CAME AND THE ROOM GREW CHILLY, HIS BODY TOLD HIM TO GET UP AND INTO BED BUT HIS MIND WOULD NOT LISTEN. HE CONTINUED TO SIT QUIETLY AND STARE AT THE EMPTY SPACE EVEN WHEN THE BLANKET FELL OUT OF THE WINDOW SILL AND IT BECAME ALMOST FREEZING IN THE ROOM...

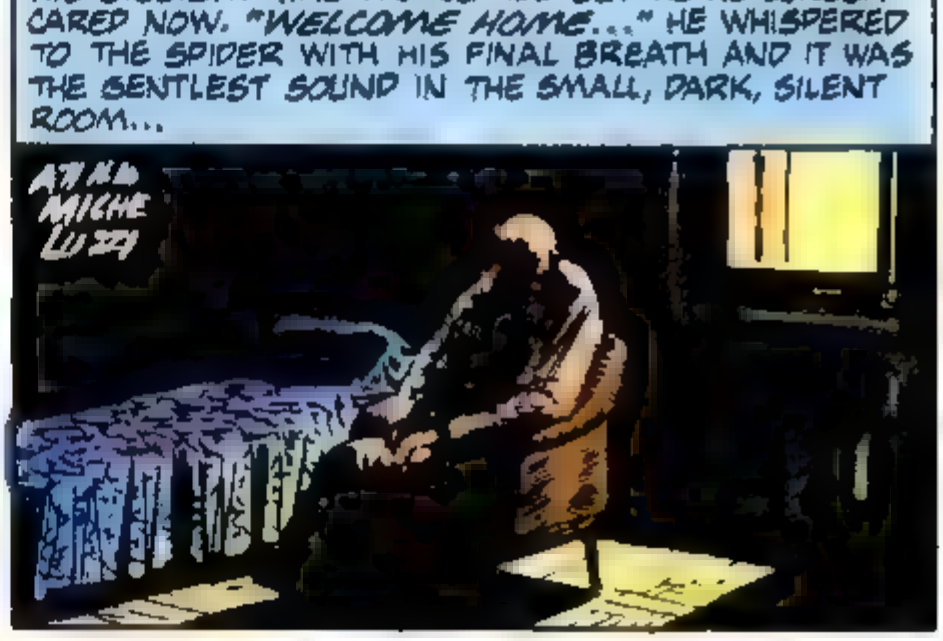


HE SAT IN THE CHAIR UNMOVING FOR THREE DAYS. SOMETIMES HE SLEPT AND SOMETIMES HE SIMPLY STARED AT THE EMPTY SPACE. HE COULD NOT FIND A REASON TO GET OFF OF THE CHAIR SO HE DID NOT. BY THE FOURTH MORNING HE WAS TOO WEAK TO GET OUT EVEN IF HE WANTED TO. THE FAT, PIMPLY GIRL NEVER CAME AGAIN. HE AWOKE THAT AFTERNOON TO SEE WARM SUN STREAMING THROUGH THE WINDOW AND FEEL A TERRIBLE PAIN IN HIS ARM AND KNEE...

THE ARTHRITIS WAS BACK, WORSE THAN EVER, NEARLY UNBEARABLE. THE PAIN MADE HIM GASP. THEN A MOVEMENT CAUGHT HIS EYE AND HE LOOKED DOWN. TO HIS AMAZEMENT AND JOY HE SAW THE SPIDER CRAWLING OVER THE ARM OF HIS CHAIR. HIS PAIN-DULLED EYES BRIGHTENED A MOMENT. ONE OF THE SPIDER'S LEGS WAS MISSING BUT IT HAD SOMEHOW ELUDED THE PREGNANT GIRL'S DUST CLOTH. HE STRETCHED OUT A TREMBLING FINGER TO IT...



THE BLACK SWOLLEN BODY WITH THE CRIMSON HOURGLASS ON ITS BELLY CLAMBERED OVER HIS FINGER. HE FELT A QUICK, SHARP STINGING IN HIS FINGER-TIP THAT PASSED BRIEFLY. THEN HE SMILED AS THE SPIDER BEGAN SPINNING A WEB BETWEEN HIS LEG AND THE ARMREST. THE ARTHRITIS PAIN IN HIS SHOULDER AND KNEE FADED LIKE THE DYING DAY AND HE KNEW HE WOULD NOT BE BOTHERED BY IT EVER AGAIN. SOON HIS EYESIGHT WAS FADING TOO BUT HE NO LONGER CARED NOW. "***WELCOME HOME...***" HE WHISPERED TO THE SPIDER WITH HIS FINAL BREATH AND IT WAS THE GENTLEST SOUND IN THE SMALL, DARK, SILENT ROOM...



HOLLY'S HOBBY

I'M AFRAID I'M GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE YOU DOWN TO THE STATION MISS DINGLE--

CALL ME HOLLY OFFICER.

--BUT BEFORE WE GO I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS, SUCH AS WHY! WHY EXACTLY DID YOU DO IT?

WELL, AS I'VE TOLD YOU BEFORE OFFICER CANADAY IT WAS MOSTLY FOR THE COMPANY. IT GETS QUITE LONELY HERE FOR A LADY OF MY AGE AND I COULD NEVER GET THEM TO STAY MUCH PAST TEA TIME. I DO ENJOY TALKING, YOU KNOW..

SHALL WE BEGIN WITH THE FIRST?

OH YES, THIS IS MY FAVORITE PART NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES YOU ASK IT

WELL NOW LET ME THINK MISS ORDWAY WAS THE VERY FIRST I BELIEVE...YES I REMEMBER IT DISTINCTLY...

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: JOHN BOLTON
Letters: Carrie McCarthy Colors: Darryl Is[illegible]

--AND MY COMPANY GUARANTEES OUR PRODUCT'S RELIABILITY! IF **HEAVENLY WOMAN SHAMPOO** DOESN'T GLORIFY YOUR HAIR WITH RADIANT LUSTER WITHIN TEN WORKING DAYS WE--

PERHAPS YOU'D LIKE TO COME IN FOR A CUP OF TEA MISS ORDWAY...

--MY GOODNESS, I'VE TALKED FOR OVER AN **HOUR! LOOK** AT THE TIME NEVER MIND THAT SECOND CUP OF TEA MISS INGLE I--MISS INGLE? WHERE **ARE** YOU?

CHOMP!

CHOMP!

CHOMP!

--AND YOU... YOU **KEPT** HER HEAD? **WHY?**

AS I SAID FOR THE **COMPANY!** MISS ORDWAY ONLY CAME BY ONCE EVERY SIX MONTHS. NOW I COULDN'T VERY WELL HAVE **THAT,** COULD I?

AHEM: SEE... AND WHAT ABOUT THE PLUMBER?

YOU THE LADY WITH THE LEAKY PIPES?

AH MR. BIGEMAN DO COME IN. CAN I OFFER YOU A NICE CUP OF TEA BEFORE YOU GET STARTED?

SAY THESE COOKIES **AIN'T BAD!** MY WIFE'S SISTER MAKES A PRETTY GOOD CHOCOLATE CHIP WHEN SHE-- MISS INGLE? YOU THERE?

CALL ME **HOLLY!**

CHOMP! CHOMP... CHOMP...

HOLLY RIGHT AS I WAS SAYIN, MY WIFE'S SI--*

--AND YOU *TALK* TO THEM, THE SALES LADY AND THE PLUMBER YOU CARRY ON CONVERSATIONS WITH THEM

OH ALL THE TIME. DAY AND NIGHT. MISS ORDWAY HAS A PARTICULARLY SOFT AND LILTING VOICE. BUT LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT THE PAPERBOY.

--AND IF YOU SUBSCRIBE NOW MY PAPER WILL KNOCK FIVE CENTS OFF THE COVER PRICE. WHAT DO YOU SAY LADY?

WELL DEAR ME IT *DOES* SOUND PROMISING WHY DON'T YOU STEP INSIDE FOR A MOMENT WHILE I LOOK FOR MY PURSE?

--AND IF I SELL (MUNCH) ENOUGH SUBSCRIPTIONS, THE PAPER (MUNCH-MUNCH) WILL SEND ME TO (MUNCH) NEW YORK FOR THE WORLD SERIES. SO FAR I'VE GOT A *HEADSTART!*

--I'M SURE YOU HAVE, JIMMY!

CHOMP!

--THE TROUBLE ALL ALONG OFFICER CANADAY WAS THE BODY AS YOU CAN SEE I HAVEN'T MUCH ROOM IN MY TINY COTTAGE, AND TAXIDERMY IS *EXPENSIVE!*

THE HEADS THEMSELVES DON'T COST MUCH. I DO MY OWN *WORK*, OF COURSE BUT YOU CAN IMAGINE STUFFING ALL THOSE BODIES WITH SAWDUST AND PRESERVATIVES (TSK-TSK)! I'D BE *EXHAUSTED!* YET A HEAD WITHOUT A BODY MAKES A POOR COMPANION WOULDN'T YOU AGREE?

SO WHAT'D YOU DO?

SIMPLE! I STUFFED JUST *ONE* BODY AND USED IT FOR MISS ORDWAY, MR. BILGEMAN *AND* JIMMY POTTER! INTERCHANGABLE, YOU SEE? ISN'T THAT CLEVER?

AND WHERE 'S THAT BODY NOW--BODY NOW--BODY NOW -BODY NOW--BODY NOW--

OH, OFFCER CANADAY, ARE YOU STUCK AGAIN?

--BODY NOW BODY NOW--

WELL, LET ME SHUT YOU OFF ANYWAY WE'RE ABOUT OUT OF CONVERSATION FOR YOU!

LET ME SEE... WHO DO WE FEEL LIKE TALKING TO NOW? ..HOW ABOUT MISS ORDWAY? YES INDEED HERE WE ARE

MAY GOOD AFTERNOON MISS ORDWAY. SO NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN

AND WHAT A LOVELY HOUSE YOU HAVE MISS DINGLE. I ADORE EARLY VICTORIAN

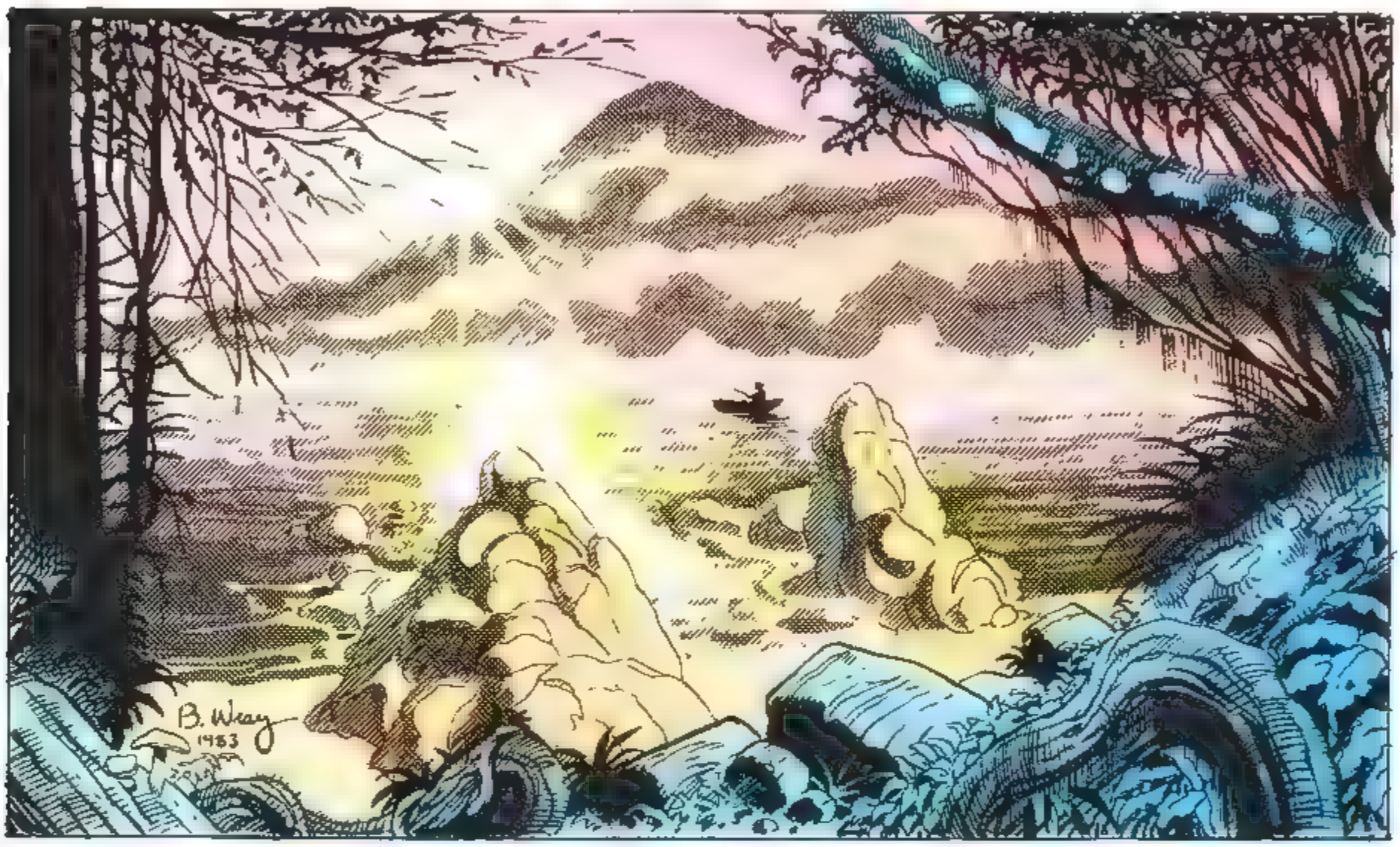
THANK YOU MISS ORDWAY NOW TELL ME ALL ABOUT YOUR NEW PRODUCT LINE.

--NOW LET ME TELL YOU ALL ABOUT MY NEW PRODUCT LINE, MISS DINGLE.

CALL ME OLLY..

HOOKED!

SOMEWHERE ACROSS THE MISTED INLET, AN EGRET'S STACCATO SCREAM CUT BACK OVER THE ROLLING WATERS TO HANSON'S GENTLY ROCKING DINGHY. THE ATLANTIC SUN WAS SINKING RAPIDLY BEHIND THE FIR TREES AND THE ROCKY NEW ENGLAND SHORELINE... ONLY A FEW MINUTES OF GOOD FISHING LEFT. HANSON CAST HIS ROD WITH A SNAP OF HIS WRIST AND SUPPRESSED A CHUCKLE. "GOOD FISHING." IT MIGHT BE GETTING TOO LATE OUT HERE, BUT THERE WAS STILL PLENTY OF TIME BACK IN TOWN! AND PLENTY OF "FISH"--THE TALL, CURVY KIND THAT BREATHED AIR AND SPENT MONEY ON YOU. YEAH, IT HAD BEEN A GOOD YEAR... HANSON HAD GONE WAY OVER HIS "QUOTA"..



HANSON PLAYED OUT MORE LINE AND SETTLED BACK WITH A CONTENTED GROAN. LIFE WAS GOOD. HOW LONG HAD IT BEEN?

HOW LONG HAD IT BEEN? HOW LONG SINCE HE'D FIRST LEARNED THAT ONLY FOOLS WORKED FROM NINE TO FIVE FOR A LIVING...THAT IF YOU WERE SMART, AND HANDSOME..

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: WILLIAM WRAY
Letters Cody Colors: Joe Chiodo

THANK YOU... HERE'S SOMETHING FOR YOUR TROUBLE...

...T-TWENTY BUCKS?!

THAT WAS THE BEGINNING... THAT WAS WHEN HE FIRST LEARNED JUST HOW FAR A PRETTY FACE AND A BIG STRONG BACK COULD GET HIM...

WHA-- YOU.! BUT.. I DIDN'T ORDER ANY GROCERIES...

JUST SOMETHING I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT NEED...

HE'D SEEN THAT LOOK IN HER EYES, THAT LONELY, WIDOWED LOOK... HE'D SEEN THE KIND OF CAR SHE'D DRIVEN, THE KIND OF JEWELRY SHE'D WORN...

--HERE'S SOMETHING ELSE I THOUGHT YOU NEEDED!

MPH!

IT WAS EASIER EVEN THAN HE'D ANTICIPATED... SHE'D NEEDED HIM ALL RIGHT... BADLY... JUST AS ALL THE OTHERS HAD LATER ON...

Y-YOU'LL COME TOMORROW?

MAYBE .. I GOTTA WORK, Y'KNOW .

WORK? WORK? WHAT A LAUGH.! HE'D NEVER HAD TO WORK AGAIN A DAY IN HIS LIFE... NOT AFTER THE FIRST TIME .

IT LOOKS WONDERFUL.! BUT ANYTHING WOULD ON YOU!

YEAH... TELL HIM I'LL TAKE THREE OF THEM.!

THERE WAS A WORD FOR GUYS LIKE HANSON.., AND THEY ALWAYS USED IT TOWARD THE END... TOWARD THE TIME WHEN HE GOT BORED, WANTED TO MOVE ON. .

GIGOLO!

NOTHING BUT A CHEAP HEARTLESS GIGOLO! YOU NEVER LOVED ME!

YOU GOT THAT ONE RIGHT, SWEETIE ' MATTER OF FACT, YOU MAKE ME A LITTLE SICK!

LEAVING... YEAH, THAT WAS THE TOUGH PART... GETTING THEM WAS A CINCH... BUT PRYING HIM-SELF AWAY FROM THEIR CLINGING, NAGGING SHRIEKING GRIP..

OH, GOD, I'LL DO ANYTHING TO KEEP YOU! DON'T LEAVE, YOU'RE TEARING ME APART!

LEGGO, WILL YA, YA FAT OL' LEECH!

MEMORIES POPPED AND VANISHED LIKE THE BUBBLES ON THE SURFACE OF THE ROLLING SEA AROUND HIM. SUDDENLY.

HOT DOG!

GOT ONE!

HE REELED IN THE WRITHING FISH, NOT UNLIKE THE WAY HE'D REELED IN EVERY WEALTHY WIDOW HE'D EVER MET OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS... LIKE THE BASS, SOONER OR LATER THEY ALL TOOK THE BAIT... IT WAS JUST TOO TEMPTING...

BLAST, SWALLOWED MY LURE...

AND, JUST AS WITH THE WIDOWS, TAKING THE LINE BACK WAS NOT ALWAYS EASY...

UGH! PULLED HIM ALL APART! WHAT A MESS!

NEARLY DARK BETTER GET BACK TO TOWN.

SPLASH!

EEEEEAGHHH!!

DEAR GOD! I'VE NEVER HEARD A SCREAM LIKE THAT!

--SOUNDED LIKE IT CAME FROM JUST OVER HERE...

BLACKNESS, PUNCTUATED ONLY BY THE GHOSTLY FORM OF A TOWERING OUT-CROPPING OF ROCK...

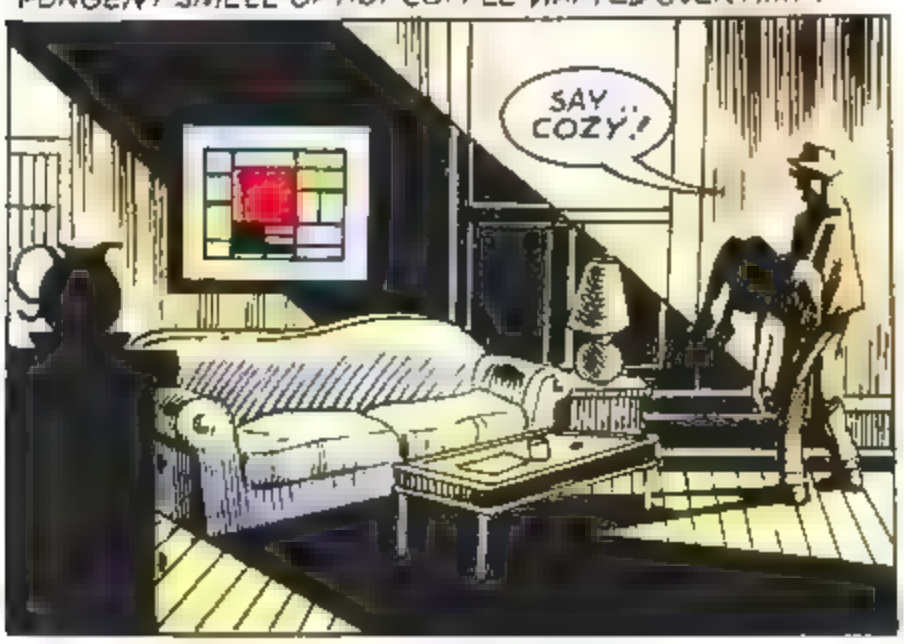
HEY THERE! WHAT GIVES?

HANSON SWUNG UP HIS LIGHT... AND GAGGED. IT STOOD THERE IN THE YELLOW CONE OF LIGHT, SWAYING AND DRIPPING... THE MOST HIDEOUS THING HE HAD EVER SET EYES ON..

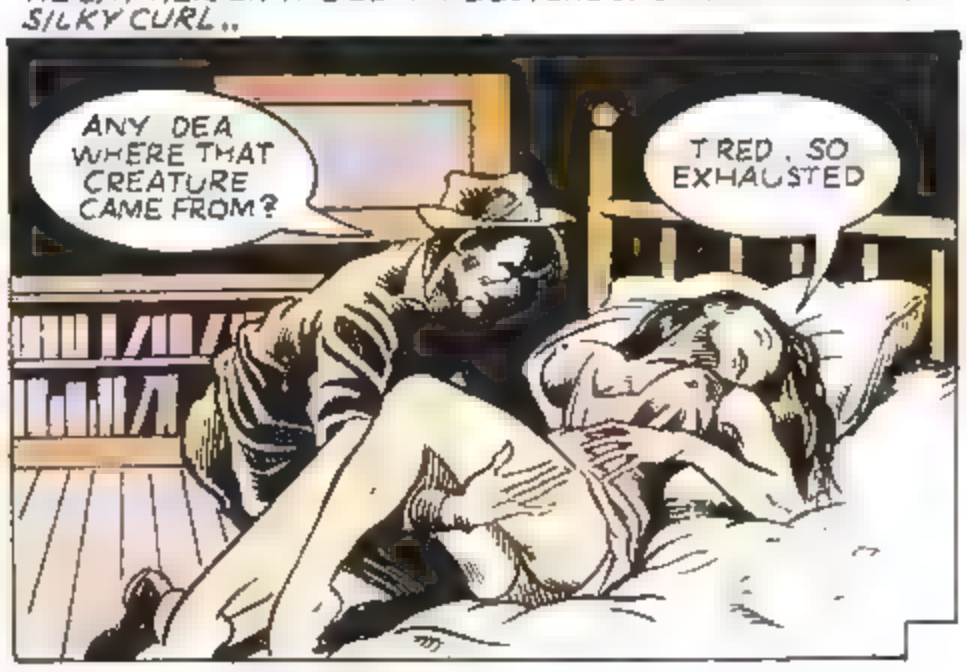
IT MADE A HALF MEWLING, HALF CROAKING SOUND, THEN TURNED SUDDENLY AND STUMBLED OFF INTO THE THICKET. HANSON DROPPED HIS BEAM TO THE SECOND FIGURE ...

A "WOMAN"... THAT WORD ALONE HARDLY CONVEYED THE INDESCRIBABLY BEAUTIFUL CREATURE HE LIFTED GENTLY, REVERENTLY INTO HIS ARMS...

HANSON KICKED OPEN THE CRUDE DOOR THE SWEET PUNGENT SMELL OF HOT COFFEE WAFTED OVER HIM .



HE LAY HER ON THE LUMPY BED, BRUSHED BACK A DARK, SILKY CURL ..



HE HURRIED TO THE "KITCHEN", POURED HER A CUP OF STEAMING JAVA. BY THE TIME HE RETURNED, SHE WAS ALREADY SITTING UP

HEY, EASY... TAKE IT SLOW...

BETTER NOW.. DRAINED ALL MY STRENGTH AWAY. BETTER .

..YES . HE DIDN'T WANT CHILDREN, RESPONS BILITY.. HE WALKED OUT WHEN I BECAME PREGNANT

MY CLOTHES ARE WET.

YOU MEAN IT (GULP!) LIVED T'S STILL ALIVE...

HANSON COULDN'T TAKE HIS EYES OFF HER .HIS MIND RACED ..

YOUR HUSBAND SHOULDN'T LEAVE YOU ALONE LIKE THIS... ALL UNPROTECTED, I MEAN ..

MY HUSBAND LEFT ME . LONG AGO...

GEE THAT'S A SHAME .

HE...HE BEAT ME WHEN HE FOUND OUT, .TERRIBLY. THEN HE LEFT I GAVE BIRTH ALL ALONE HERE IN THE SHACK

GEE THAT'S (GULP!) THAT'S ROUGH!

THE CHILD WAS HEALTHY BUT DEFORMED. MY HUSBAND, HE'D HIT ME IN THE STOMACH

YOU SAW THE *RESULT* OF MY HUSBAND'S FOLLY ON THE BEACH.

MY GOD THAT *CREATURE!*

THE CHILD IS HUGE NOW, BUT STILL LIKE A BAB Y N--IN THE HEAD, VERY OFTEN I CANNOT CONTRO_ HIM . HE L KES TO PLAY.. *GAMES* GAMES I TAUGHT H M

, DEAR GOD.

NEVER FEAR ,WE'RE PERFECTLY SAFE AS LONG AS THE DOOR ,S SHUT. WOULD YOU CARE FOR SOME SUPPER?

THANK YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND HAS NEVER RETURNED HERE, TO SEE THE...CHILD ?

ONLY THE ONE TIME. HE NEVER COMES NEAR THE HOUSE NOW, HE'S AFRAID OF MAYNARD. MAYNARD LIKES TO *PLAY*..

I GAVE HIM A *PRESENT* ONCE... HE PULLED IT INSIDE OUT... WOULD YOU LIKE SOME COFFEE?

THIS! THIS IS WHAT I'D LIKE! AND SO WOULD *YOU!*

EASY...SO EASY... WHETHER YOUNG OR OLD, FAT OR SLIM... EVEN THIS RAVING BEAUTY WAS NO EXCEPTION... NOT WHEN YOUR NAME IS GEORGE HANSON...

. T'S BEEN SO LONG

YEAH I'LL BET, OUT HERE IN THIS CRUMMY SHACK 'N ALL!

DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE, MR. HANSON, SITTING ALL ALONE NIGHT AFTER NIGHT TAKING CARE OF A CHILD NO ONE *WANTED* ..WAITING...WAITING FOR THE ONE YOU LOVE TO RETURN. . KNOWING HE *NEVER* WILL...

IT RIPS YOUR GUTS APART, MR HANSON, IT TEARS YOU INSIDE OUT. IT MAKES YOU *HATE* ..IT MAKES YOU HATE MORE THAN YOU EVER THOUGHT YOURSELF CAPABLE OF...

HANSON WATCHED HER, A COLD KNOT FORMING IN HIS THROAT... HER EYES WERE . FUNNY . GLAZED . HER WORDS CUT THE SALTY NIGHT LIKE A KNIFE..

IT WAS MAYNARD'S BIRTHDAY, MR. HANSON, AND I GAVE H.M A PRESENT I GAVE HIM HIS *FATHER*...

HANSON STUMBLED FROM THE BED, DRAGGING UP HIS PANTS. .LEGS TREMBLING LIKE JELLY...

YEAH, THAT'S GREAT, LADY, BUT I GOTTA BE GOIN' NOW, SEE ?...

THAT'S NOT THE FRONT DOOR, MR HANSON...THAT'S THE DOOR TO THE...

NURSERY!

AGHH!

IT CAME OUT OF THE REEKING "NURSERY"... A TALL, HULKING MASS OF BRISTLING SINEW AND MORONIC MIND...NOT THE H DEOUS THING ON THE BEACH AT ALL, BUT SOMETHING FAR WORSE..

UH-UH-UH... PLAY? UH-UH PLAY?...

NO! OH GOD, LET GO OF ME!

HANSON REMEMBERED THE THING ON THE BEACH THEN... REALIZED WHO IT WAS AND WHY IT HAD LOOKED THAT WAY...

IT'S A TERRIBLE THING TO BE ALONE, MR HANSON...IT TEARS YOUR GUTS OUT

..AND HANSON THOUGHT OF THE FISH HE'D CAUGHT HOW IT HAD SWALLOWED HIS LURE... AND WHAT HE'D DONE TO GET IT BACK...

UH-UH-UH ..

FWUBBLE..

...IT TURNS YOU INSIDE OUT!

B Wray ©83

SASQUATCH

AHOY THERE! YOU SAM PETERSON?

COULD BE. WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, MISTER?

THEY SAY DOWN BELOW YOU'RE AN EXPERT TRACKER, THAT SO?

YOU LOOKING TO BUY SOME SKINS?

NAME'S DOBBS, LARRY DOBBS. I'M LOOKING FOR A *GUIDE* IS WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT MOUNTAINEERING MYSELF

I THOUGHT NOT-- "*AHOY THERE*" IS USUALLY A NAUTICAL TERM, MR DOBBS I'M HARRY PETERSON WHAT WERE YOU LOOKING TO PAY?

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: IAN AIKEN & BRIAN GARVEY

Letters: Cody Colors: Joe Chiodo

AS MUCH AS YOU WANT. I'VE BEEN TRYING UNSUCCESSFULLY TO BAG -- NO, *FIND* -- A BIG HORN SHEEP ALL WINTER 'ALL I WANT IS ONE, THEN I'LL GO BACK TO MY DESK AND SALESCHARTS LIKE A GOOD BOY! HOW ABOUT IT?

WHEN WERE YOU WANTING TO START?

NOW! IMMEDIATELY! *TODAY!* I'VE ONLY GOT A FEW HOURS OF VACATION LEFT BEFORE MY BOSS COMES HUNTING *MY* HEAD!

JUST THROW THOSE ON THE PILE. AND WIPE YOUR FEET FIRST, PLEASE...

NICE! COZY!

MY WIFE'S TOUCH. SHE'S IN TOWN SHOPPING FOR THE DAY. COFFEE?

YEAH, THANKS!

I CAN GET YOU UP THE NORTH SLOPE AND DOWN AGAIN BEFORE NIGHTFALL, BUT ONLY PROVIDENCE CAN PROMISE YOU A RAM MY FEE'S THREE HUNDRED.

SOUNDS FINE.

THERE'S ONLY ONE PROBLEM...

THERE'S A STORM BLOWING IN -- MIGHT REACH US TONIGHT, MIGHT NOT, BUT IN ANY CASE YOU LOOK A MITE *SHORT* OF SUPPLIES...

LIKE I SAID, I'M A *TENDERFOOT!*

ALL RIGHT -- I CAN LEND YOU THE GEAR, I RECKON JUST DON'T GO STIFF ON ME IF THINGS GET A MITE BLUSTERY. IF WE LEAVE NOW, WE CAN PROBABLY BE BACK BEFORE MY WIFE GETS HOME.

GREAT! LEAD ON, HARRY!

WHEW! THIS GEAR IS *HEAVY*! YOU ALWAYS CARRY THIS MUCH STUFF?

I DO WHEN THERE'S A STORM THREATENING. SEE THAT LINE OF THUNDER-HEADS MARCHING IN? WE'RE GOING TO GET HIT, ALL RIGHT!

UNSLING YOUR RIFLE VERY SLOWLY, MR. DOBBS. I THINK YOU MIGHT JUST BE IN LUCK...

HOLY--!

BANG!

BAH! CLEAN MISS! AND THERE HE GOES!

BEST MAKE CAMP HERE, THAT WIND'S *PICKING UP*! UNLESS YOU WANT TO HEAD BACK, MR. DOBBS...

HECK, NO, I WANT THAT RAM'S HEAD OVER MY MANTEL! DRIVE THEM STAKES, HARRY, WE'RE STAYING!

AS YOU WISH...

LISTEN TO THAT WIND--HOWLING LIKE A *DEMON*!

YEAH... OR OLD SASQUATCH...

YOU.. YOU'VE *HEARD* THE LEGEND OF THE SASQUATCH MONSTER, MR. DOBBS...

HEARD IT? HAH! MR PETERSON, I'VE *LIVED* IT!

OH? HOW SO?

NEVER MIND... YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE ME... NOBODY EVER DOES. I HARDLY BELIEVE IT MYSELF, EXCEPT...

GO ON MR DOBBS, I'M INTRIGUED..

ALL RIGHT... BUT I M WARN NG YOU--YOU WON'T BELIEVE IT!

IT WAS... LET'S SEE, ABOUT TWENTY YEARS AGO NOW, I GUESS. YEAH... 1963. WE WERE IN COLORADO ..LORIE AND I ..LORIE... LORIE ..

" I CAN SEE HER AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY. BEAUTIFUL, VIVACIOUS, *RECKLESS* LORIE...

BUT I M *SICK* OF THIS STUFFY OLD CAB·N! EVEN THE SKI LODGE WAS BETTER! THERE'S NOTHING TO *DO* HERE!

HONEY, I THOUGHT WE CAME UP HERE TO SK.!

I *HATE* SKIING! IT'S SO... *SNOBBISH*! ISN'T THERE SOMETHING ELSE WE COULD DO?

NOT MUCH! YOU HATE ICE SKATING AND HUNTING--

HUNTING! OH, THAT SOUNDS *THRILLING!*

HONEY, I WASN'T *SERIOUS*! YOU NEED EQUIPMENT FOR HUNTING... YOU NEED A *GUIDE*!

THAT SOUNDS EASY! WAITER! COME OVER HERE A MINUTE!

"LORIE FOUND SOME LOCAL GUY NAMED SEARS. TALK ABOUT *SNOBBISH*, BUT HE DID KNOW HIS WAY AROUND THE HILLS.

YES, I CAN TAKE YOU UP, BUT I WARN YOU, IT'S NOT AN EASY TRIP FOR A WOMAN...

HA-HA! YOU DON'T KNOW *LORIE!*

JUST POINT THE WAY, MR. SEARS, I'LL OUT-DISTANCE THE *TWO* OF YOU!

OKAY, BUT WE'LL NEED PLENTY OF GEAR AND--

HEY, MAC! SPARE A *DIME*?..

HOW 'BOUT *SHEW*, LADY? SPARE A FEW BITS FOR A NEEDY CONCERN?..

GET *OUT* OF HERE!

I SAID LEAVE US *ALONE!*

UH!

WOW

I HATE GUYS LIKE THAT! NO HOME, NO FAMILY, NO *IDENTITY*! THEY'D BE BETTER OFF *DEAD!*

I DON'T LIKE HIM, LARRY, LET'S GET SOMEONE ELSE!

HE'S JUST GOT A LITTLE CLASS COMPLEX, THAT'S ALL. BESIDES, HE STOOD UP FOR *YOU*, DIDN'T HE? I'D THINK YOU'D BE *IMPRESSED!*

"WE STARTED THE NEXT DAY AND IF YOU THINK *YOU* BROUGHT A LOT OF SUPPLIES, MR. PETERSON, YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THIS GUY SEARS?...

IS ALL THAT STUFF NECESSARY, MR SEARS?

THERE ARE THREE OF US, MR. DOBBS, AND YOUR WIFE LOOKS A LITTLE SMALL TO BE LUGGING A KNAPSACK

ARROGANT P.G!

HEE-HEE! EASY HONEY, HE M.GHT BE RIGHT! THREE PEOPLE REQUIRE A *BIG* TENT! BESIDES, HE'S THE ONE PULLING THE SLED!

"WE SAW NOTHING ALL DAY. AND THAT NIGHT, TO MAKE UP FOR IT, SEARS FELT COMPELLED TO *ENTERTAIN* US. .

-THE LEGEND OF THE SASQUATCH MONSTER IS OLDER THAN THESE HILLS, MY FRIENDS! SOME CLAIM THE BEAST HAUNTS THESE VERY WOODS .

REALLY, MR SEARS...

IT'S ALL TRUE, DEAR LADY. I'VE EVEN CAUGHT SIGHT OF THE BEAST A FEW TIMES MYSELF...

OH? AND WHAT DID IT *LOOK* LIKE MR. SEARS, OR DARE I ASK?

HARD TO SAY, ALWAYS SAW IT FROM A DISTANCE... TALL, HAIRY... *UNPLEASANT*-LOOKING, TO SAY THE LEAST...

"I WAS IN CANADA, WORKING THE BEAVER LINES I--*SMELLED* THE THING BEFORE I SAW IT--*GODAWFUL* ODOR! LIKE *DRY ROT*! THEN I TURNED AROUND...

MY GOD..

"I WAS LUCKY, THOUGH... I WAS A *MAN*! IT WASN'T INTERESTED IN *ME*, IT WAS SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING *ELSE*! I WATCHED AS IT TURNED CONFIDENTLY AND STRODE BACK INTO THE WOODS...

"OTHERS HAVEN'T BEEN SO LUCKY. THE SASQUATCH IS SEEKING A *MATE*, YOU SEE, AND MORE THAN A FEW TIMES IT'S BEEN KNOWN TO SMELL OUT THE *HUMAN* KIND...

EEEE

"GUNS, APPARENTLY, ARE *USELESS* AGAINST THEM NOTHING SHORT OF A *HOWITZER* COULD PIERCE THAT THICK, MATTED HIDE...

"WHAT KIND OF *HORROR* THE WOMAN WHO IS CAPTURED EXPERIENCES, WE CAN ONLY *GUESS*. ONE THING IS CLEAR.. WHEN THE BEAST IS *THROUGH* WITH THEM--

"--THEY *NEVER* RETURN..."

WHOOOOOO!

WH-WHAT WAS *THAT*?

JUST THE WIND..

YOUR WIFE HAS GOOD REASON TO BE *NERVOUS*...

YEAH? HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S NOT A *GAY* ONE, MR. SEARS? CAN WE GO TO *SLEEP* NOW, PLEASE?

HA-HA! G'NIGHT, SEARS!

SLEEP WELL!

"SEARS GOT US UP AT DAWN...

RISE AND SHINE!

NUTS TO YOU! I LOST HALF A NIGHT'S SLEEP DREAMING ABOUT THAT DAMNED *CREATURE*! YOU GUYS GO *WITHOUT* ME!

C'MON, HONEY, YOU'RE THE ONE WHO *WANTED* TO--

THAT'S ALL RIGHT, OLD MAN, LET HER SLEEP! I SAW SOME *DEER TRACKS* JUST HALF A MILE FROM HERE YESTERDAY. WE'LL BE OUT AND BACK BEFORE NOON.

"SO SEARS AND I STRUCK OUT ALONE...

SNOW!

VEAH, BETTER STICK CLOSE JUST IN CASE...

"I TRIED TO KEEP SEARS' BOBBING *RED PARKA* IN SIGHT, BUT SOON THE WIND PICKED UP... EVERYTHING BECAME A SNOWY BLUR...

SEARS? YOU THERE? SEARS?

"ABRUPTLY, SOME DISTANCE AWAY...

BLAM! BLAM!

AGHHHHHH

"I BLUNDERED OFF BLINDLY IN THE DIRECTION OF THE GUN BLASTS. SUDDENLY...

SEARS ?

AGHH! SEARS! (CHOKE!)

"IT WAS SEARS... OR AT LEAST SEARS' BRIGHT RED PARKA . HIS HEAD WAS MISSING!

"I STUMBLED BACK TOWARD THE TENT, LEGS TREMBLING VIOLENTLY...

EEEEEEE

LORIE!

LORIE! LORIE!

"WHAT WAS *LEFT* OF THE TENT WAS SCATTERED ABOUT HAPHAZARDLY IN THE SNOW. THE SUPPLIES WERE *GONE*... AS WAS--

DEAR GOD..

"THEN I SAW THEM.. BARELY VISIBLE ON THE CREST OF A WINDBLOWN HILL ... LORIE AND... THAT *CREATURE* ...

"I FIRED *OVER* AND *OVER* AGAIN AT THE BEAST'S BACK... I *COULDN'T* HAVE MISSED... BUT THE BULLETS HAD NO EFFECT...

"I RAN AFTER THEM... *SCREAMING* HER NAME... BUT A *WALL* OF SNOW CLOSED IN AROUND ME...

LORRRIEEEE..

"THEY VANISHED IN THE WHITENESS. I STRUGGLED ON FOR HOURS. TOWARD EVENING I WAS NEAR DEAD AND HOPELESSLY LOST. THEN MY FOOT COLLIDED WITH SOMETHING...

"IT WAS A LONG-DEAD RACCOON PARTIALLY *ROTTED*... BUT IT WAS *STILL FOOD* .. I CLOSED MY EXHAUSTED EYES AND DREW IT TO MY MOUTH..."

THAT DEAD RACCOON SAVED MY *LIFE* .. FOUR DAYS LATER I STUMBLED INTO TOWN RAVING ABOUT LORIE AND THE SASQUATCH 'COURSE, NO ONE *BELIEVED* ME CAN'T BLAME THEM REALLY

I NEVER QUIT *SEARCHING* THOUGH.. I'VE COMBED THE LAND, IN FACT HUNTING FOR HER...FOR THE MONSTER THAT TOOK HER .. IT LED ME ALL THE WAY TO YOUR LITTLE CABIN, MR. "PETERSON" IS IT?

I ALMOST DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU, SEARS. TWENTY YEARS, A BEARD AND A FEW POUNDS CAN MAKE A *WORLD* OF DIFFERENCE ! HOW *LONG* DID YOU AND LORIE HAVE IT PLANNED, SEARS?

AND KILLING THAT POOR ALLEY BUM, STUFFING HIM IN THE SLED-- *CUTTING OFF HIS HEAD* AND DRESSING HIM IN YOUR *PARKA*... WHAT DO YOU CALL *THAT*?

THAT WE CALL *MURDER* MR DOBBS IT GOES LIKE

THAT'S QU TE A *STORY* MR DOBBS.

YES I *THOUGHT* YOU MIGHT FIND IT INTERESTING THEY NEVER *FOUND* MY WIFE OF COURSE.

AND THE ANIMALS TOOK CARE OF WHAT WAS LEF OF POOR SEARS..

WE MET AT THE SKI LODGE WHEN YOU WERE OUT ON THE SLOPES - IT WAS WHAT YOU'D CALL "*LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT*"! WE WERE WILLING TO GIVE UP EVERYTHING TO BE TO-GETHER--THAT'S WHAT YOU CALL *DEVOTION*!

- THIS!

NOT THE SAME BRAND OF BLANK CARTRIDGES YOU PUT IN MY RIFLE THAT DAY, BUT JUST AS INEFFECTIVE.!

NO.!

IT WON'T WORK, SEARS. THERE'S NOWHERE TO RUN IN THIS STORM.!

YOU CAN'T ESCAPE ME SEARS

..THE TENT.!

HA-HA-HA.! THERE GO THE SUPPLIES, DOBBS.! I MAY DIE OUT HERE, BUT SO WILL YOU.! YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT BACK IN THIS SNOW WITHOUT FOOD.!

YOU'RE QUITE WRONG, SEARS...YOU SEE, I LIED TO YOU ABOUT ONE LITTLE PART OF MY STORY: THAT WASN'T A DEAD RACCOON I FOUND IN THE SNOW THAT DAY.. IT WASN'T AN ANIMAL THAT KEPT ME ALIVE ALL THE WAY BACK TO TOWN...

..IT WAS SOMETHING YOU DROPPED IN THE SNOW AFTER YOU AND LORIE TOOK OFF ..IT WAS THE HEAD OF THAT ALLEY BUM, SEARS..

..IT KEPT ME ALIVE, SEARS...

...THE SAME WAY YOURS WILL NOW

SHUT-IN

...NOW THERE'S LEMONADE IN THE REFRIGERATOR AND SOME CHERRY PIE ON THE COUNTER, MARY ANN... PLEASE HELP YOURSELF TO ANYTHING YOU LIKE. I'VE LEFT THE PHONE NUMBER OF THE PEOPLE I'LL BE VISITING TONIGHT IN THE HALL.

DON'T FUSS OVER MR. BARTLETT. HE'LL BE FINE UNTIL I GET BACK ...AROUND TWELVE-THIRTY OR SO.

YES, MRS. BARTLETT.

GOOD NIGHT DARLING. I'LL BRING YOU SOME NICE BUTTER-BRICKLE ICE CREAM FROM THE STORE

GOOD NIGHT MA'AM.

WELL... IT'S JUST YOU AND ME, GRAMPS

..AND A TON OF HOMEWORK

SQUEE SQUEE

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: LIBERATORE
Letters: Carrie McCarthy Colors: Joe Chiodo

CRAP. I'LL NEVER GET THIS GODDAMN ALGEBRA.

DING DONG

H. DOLL. HOW'S THE BIGGEST SET OF KNOCKERS IN HAYWOOD?

KENNY. WHAT'RE YOU DOIN HERE?

LOOK I GOTTA FINAL TOMORROW

SO WHAT? YOU'LL JUST FLUNK IT AGAIN ANYWAY. THEY GOT ANY JUNK TO EAT AROUND HERE? I'M STARVED.

YOU'RE ALWAYS STARVED.

REALLY I'VE GOT TO STUDY

YEAH YEAH SURE...

WHO'S THE GUY GLUED TO THE TUBE?

THAT'S WHO I'M SITTING FOR. MR BARTLETT HE'S TOTALLY PARALYZED-- STROKE OR SOMETHING. HE CAN'T TALK OR HEAR I'M NOT SURE HE CAN SEE..

WHAT A BUMMER..

HEY. GET A LOAD OF THE WATER BED. HOT DAMN.

EEE-HAH!

KENNY CUT IT OUT. YOU'LL PUNCTURE THAT THING

EVER SHOW YOU MY DOUBLE BACK FLIP ON THE TRAMPOLINE?

SPRONG!

SPRONG!

STOP IT, YOU DIOT (GIGGLE-GIGGLE.)

C'MON, DOLL! LET'S MAKE SOME WAVES.

OH, YOU RE IMPOSS BLE

...M-M-M...

YOU GET STRIPPED..I'LL KNOCK DOWN THE LIGHTS N THE LIVING ROOM.

WELL...I SUPPOSE IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO GET RID OF YOU...

ZIP!

SOUL...SOUL...

...SOUL

...SOUL

MR BARTLETT?

...SOUL...SOUL

HA-HA-HA! YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN THE LOOK ON YOUR FACE!

DAMN YOU, KENNY!

I OUGHTA CUT YOU OFF FOR THAT!

AW, C'MON DOLL. .DON'T BE GRIM! IT WAS FUNNY!

NOT IN FRONT OF HIM, YOU JERK!

WHY NOT? HE AIN'T GONNA TELL! BESIDES, YOU SA.D HE COULDN'T SEE ANYWAY...

NO, I SAID HE *MIGHT* NOT--M-M-M-M... I...M-M-M-M...

OH, KENNY... (GASP!)... M-M-M...

OH, DARLING... OH, GOD!... *OH YES!*...

YOU'VE GOT TO GO NOW, KENNY.

NOT UNTIL YOU FEED ME.

HEY! WATERMELON! AND PIZZA!

THERE'S LEMONADE IN THERE SOMEWHERE

LOOK! TURKEY!

GRAB THE PIE, WILL YOU?

WHAT'RE YOU DOIN?

MAYBE GRANDPA'S HUNGRY TOO!

SQUIT...

YOU'RE CRAZY...

LOOK, DOLL I'M MARIO ANDRETTI!

KENNY!

SQUIT

SQUIT...

KENNY!

CRASH!!

HA-HA! C'MON, MARY ANN-- YOU TRY IT.

YOU LUNATIC!

KENNY! NO! NO!

CLEAR THE TRACKS.

EEEEEE!

EEEEEEE!

CRASH!

SHATTER!

HA-HA! HEY! LOOK AT GRANDPA: HE'S GROWIN HAIR!

HA-HA-HA!

OH, KENNY! HA-HA! WHAT A MESS!

LOOK OUT, GRAMPS! YER LOSIN' ALL YER MEATBALLS!

HA-HA! OH, KENNY! IT'S HYSTERICAL!

THE LATEST FALL FASHIONS.

AND LEST WE FORGET...

A LITTLE WHIPPED CREAM TO TOP T OFF!

CARMEN MIRANDA!

HA-HA-HA!

SOME MUSIC PROFESSOR!

CLIK!

OH, KENNY!.. HA-HA!... IT'S... HA-HA ..IT'S A RIOT! HA-HA!

BOP BOP. A-DIDDY BOP BOP. A-DOO

HERE, GRAMPS! HAVE A DRINK! LOOSEN UP. YA LOOK LIKE YA GOT A TWO-BY-FOUR UP YER BACK!

LOOK AT THAT GRAMPS BET YOU NEVER SEEN A SEVENTEEN YEAR OLD STRIPPIN' BEFORE HAVE YA?

...OOOSHO-OBE-WAH! ..OOOSHO-OBE-OOO!

...POOOOB SHOOBE-- OOF!

LOOK OUT HA-HA-HA!

HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

AH AH AH A

AH AH AH

WHAT THE HELL..

AH-AH-AH!

KENNY! HE'S... HE'S... OH MY GOD!

HEY HEY GRAMPS

IT WAS JUST A JOKE, NOW! TAKE IT EAS--ERK!

KENNY!

WAIT! DON'T CHOKE DON'T--

BLAGH!

EEEEEEEE!

NO! NO! OH MY GOD!

...GLUBBLE... FLUB...

KLHOK!

...OH JESUS... JESUS!...

NOOOOOOOO!

SQUEE... SQUEE...

NO! NO! LET ME OUT! HELP!! SOMEBODY HELP!!

SQUEE... SQUE

SQUE... SQU

OPERATOR! OPERATOR!

OH DEAR GOD..

SQUE... SQU

..PLEASE... PLEASE... I'LL DO ANYTHING! I DON'T WANT TO DIE.

SQUEE

AGH!

WHUMP

OH NO. OH GOD NO! NOT THAT!

SMAP!

SQUEE... SQUEE... SQUEE... SQUEE...

AAGGGGHHHHH!

YOO-HOO! I'M HOME!

S EVERYTHING OKAY?

YES MA'AM.

I COULDN'T GET THROUGH IT WITHOUT IT, MRS. BARTLETT.

OH, HELLO, KENNY. BEEN HELPING MARY ANN WITH HER HOMEWORK?

THANK YOU AGAIN, MARY ANN. SEE YOU NEXT TIME!

POOR MR. BARTLETT. I FEEL SO SORRY FOR HIM.

YEAH. I WONDER WHAT A GUY LIKE THAT THINKS ABOUT ALL DAY...

FIRST WE'LL TAKE YOU TO THE BATHROOM... THEN WE'LL PLAY A NICE HAND OF SOLITAIRE TOGETHER.. THEN I'LL READ TO YOU FOR AWHILE. THEN..

BLAM!

BLAM! BLAM!

CHOP! CHOP!

HACK!

BLAM!

...AND THEN WE'LL SIT DOWN IN THE KITCHEN AND HAVE SOME NICE BUTTER-BRICKLE ICE CREAM...AND THEN..

END

WAY DOWN THERE BELOW IN THE DARK

SEG LIVED IN THE SEWER. HE HAD LIVED THERE *ALL* THE YEARS OF HIS LIFE, HOWEVER LONG *THAT* WAS. SEG DID NOT KNOW. HE COULD NOT COUNT. HE COULD NOT SPEAK. HE COULD NOT REALLY *THINK*, IN THE ORDINARY SENSE OF THE WORD.

PLOP.

HE WAS ALONE AND *BLIND* AND THE ONLY ONE OF HIS SPECIES, WHATEVER THAT SPECIES WAS...HE EXISTED IN THE SEWER. THAT WAS ALL.

SEG ATE GARBAGE. THERE WAS *RARELY* AN ABSENCE OF IT. SOMETIMES, WHEN HE WAS LUCKY OR WHEN HE HAPPENED ON A SICK ONE, HE ATE RATS. HE ATE THEM RAW AND SOMETIMES HALF-ALIVE. MOSTLY HE SLEPT.

enriquez

HE WAS CONTENT ENOUGH.

SLEEPING OCCUPIED SEVENTY PER CENT OF HIS LIFE. FORAGING THE OTHER THIRTY. HE HAD NO ENEMIES. THE SEWER WAS VERY OLD AND VERY DEEP AND HE KNEW ALL THE PLACES TO HIDE, IF THERE HAD BEEN ENEMIES. BUT THERE WERE NONE.

GERALD?...

SPLASH

SPLOOSH

LIFE WAS A *CEMENT WOMB*...

Story **BRUCE JONES** Art **THOM ENRIQUEZ**
Letters **CARRIE McCARTHY** Color: **JOE CHIODO**

WHAT DO I *TELL* YOU ABOUT DRINKING FROM *MY* GLASS GERALD?

ALLIGATORS LIVING IN SEWERS

HE DON'T DRINK OUT OF OTHER PEOPLES GLASSES. I'VE *TOLD* YOU THAT.

ELLEN, PLEASE... ...DON'T HE'S *DEAF!*

HAVEN'T I?

WHAP!

HE CAN'T *HEAR* YOU

HE DOESN'T *KNOW* ANY BETTER

LOOK AT YOU. GROVELING ON THE FLOOR BESIDE YOUR PATHETIC SON. THERE'S *NOTHING* WRONG WITH HIM WILLARD. HE'S MERELY *DISOBEDIENT!*

HE'S A GOOD BOY.

NO WILLARD HE'S A VERY *WICKED* LITTLE BOY... BUT HE WILL LEARN... HE WILL LEARN...

I'D LIKE MY TOAST NOW, WILLARD... *WILLARD?*

THOUGH TOTALLY BLIND SINCE BIRTH--WHENEVER ***THAT*** WAS--SEG'S SENSE OF ***HEARING*** WAS ***ACUTE***. HE COULD DISCERN THE MINUTE SOUNDS OF A ROACH WALKING ALONG THE CAVERN CEILING.

HSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS

HE COULD HEAR THE FAR AWAY NOISE OF A CAB'S TIRES MAKING A CRISP HUMMING SOUND ON THE PAVEMENT FAR ABOVE HIS HEAD...

IT WAS THIS ***SUPERNORMAL*** ABILITY TO HEAR THAT ALLOWED SEG TO SURVIVE DOWN HERE IN THE DARKNESS AND SLIME. NO SOUND ESCAPED THOSE INCREDIBLE EARS...WHETHER THAT OF APPROACHING FOOD OR--***APPROACHING DANGER!***

THERE WERE ***ALLIGATORS*** IN SEG'S HOME--NOT MANY, BUT ENOUGH TO KEEP HIM VIGILANT. THEY WERE THE DISCARDED PRODUCT OF IMPATIENT YOUNG BOYS, REJECTED BIRTHDAY PRESENTS FLUSHED DOWN CONVENIENT TOILETS...

...HERE IN SEG'S WORLD THEY ***GREW!***

SEG HAD KILLED PERHAPS A HALF DOZEN OF THEM. ALWAYS INEVITABLY THEY TOOK A LITTLE OF HIS STRANGE MEMBRANEOUS SELF ***WITH*** THEM...SEG DIDN'T MIND...

PANT...PANT

WITHIN TWO TO SIX DAYS AN ***EXTRAORDINARY*** THING HAPPENED TO SEG'S DENUDED TISSLE...

...IT ***ALWAYS*** GREW BACK...

SLURP

MUNCH MUNCH

GNASH

GNASH

SLURRRP

--AS I'VE SAID BEFORE, MR. KYLE, THERE'S NO **BIOLOGICAL** DAMAGE TO THE INNER EAR ITSELF THAT WE CAN DISCERN. THE BOY HAS BEEN EXAMINED THOROUGHLY

WE BELIEVE THE TROUBLE TO BE **PSYCHOSOMATIC**...

HMMM.

OH?

HE DOESN'T HEAR BECAUSE HE DOESN'T **WANT** TO HEAR. YOU SEE THERE'S NOTHING OBSTRUCTING THE MESSAGE FROM THE EAR DRUM TO THE BRAIN, IT'S SIMPLY THAT--

I BELIEVE I **KNOW** THE DEFINITION OF **HYSTERICAL DEAFNESS**, DOCTOR, I'M A TRAINED **NURSE!**

I BELIEVE I **ALSO** KNOW THE DEFINITION OF A **QUACK**, A TERM I ASSUME **YOU'RE** FAMILIAR WITH DOCTOR...

ELLEN, **PLEASE**...HE'S A LICENSED PHYSICIAN, HE SHOULD **KNOW** IF... IF...

COME, GERALD, IT'S NEARLY TIME FOR YOUR **ENEMA**.

ARE YOU **COMING**, WILLARD?

I'M SORRY DOCTOR

HMPH.

I **WARNED** YOU THAT WOULD BE A WASTE OF TIME, WILLARD. PERHAPS YOU'LL LISTEN TO ME NEXT TIME.

ELLEN **PLEASE**! THE KID IS **SICK**! HE NEEDS **HELP**!

NOTHING A GOOD STRONG **HOT WATER ENEMA** WON'T CURE! GET IN THE CAR, GERALD! DON'T DAWDLE.

WHEN HE WASN'T SLEEPING OR EATING, SEG SOMETIMES LIKED TO PLAY A ***GAME***. IT WAS HIS VERY ***OWN*** GAME AND HE HAD INVENTED IT ALL BY HIMSELF. FIRST HE WOULD JUST SIT VERY QUIETLY IN A CORNER... THEN HE WOULD WAIT FOR SOME CREATURE TO HAPPEN BY: MAYBE A ROACH. MAYBE A WATERBUG

...OR A RAT.

WHEN HE HEARD THE CREATURE COMING, SEG WOULD ***CONCENTRATE*** ON IT WITH ALL HIS MIGHT, JAMMING SHUT HIS HUGE EYES AND GIVING IT ALL HIS ATTENTION...

AND IF HE WORKED AT IT ***HARD*** ENOUGH, A STRANGE THING WOULD HAPPEN... HE WOULD SOMEHOW ***DISSOLVE*** INTO THE CREATURES BRAIN...

SORT OF ABSORB ITS MIND, WHAT LITTLE MIND IT HAD...

ONCE A ***BUTTERFLY*** HAD DRIFTED INTO THE SEWER AND SEG HAD ENTERED ITS MINISCULE MIND AND HAD FLAPPED AND FLUTTERED AND DIPPED AND THOUGHT-FOR A BRIEF TIME-BUTTERFLY THOUGHTS...

HE HAD STAYED INSIDE THE INSECT'S MIND UNTIL IT HAD ***LEFT*** THE SEWER AND FLOWN OUTSIDE HIGH ABOVE THE BUSY CITY AND SEG HAD SEEN ALL THE ***WONDROUS, COLORFUL, LOUD, STRANGE, HAUNTING*** SIGHTS BELOW THROUGH THE BUTTERFLY'S EYES...

HONK

BEEP

SCREECH

BEEP

BLAM

THEN THE LITTLE BUTTERFLY HAD FLOWN ***TOO*** FAR AWAY AND SEG WAS BACK IN THE DARKNESS AND DANKNESS WITH THE SOUNDS OF SCUTTLING VERMIN AND THE TRICKLING OF CESS WATER...

HE'LL START SCHOOL SOON, ELLEN-- HE'LL NEED SPECIAL *TUTORS*--

GERALD WILL RECIEVE ALL THE TRAINING HE EVER NEEDS RIGHT AT HOME, WILLARD. *I'LL* SEE TO THAT!

HE'S *DROPPED* HIS DOLL. ELLEN, *STOP!*

AAAGH!

I SHOULD SAY NOT! THIS IS A *VILE* NEIGHBORHOOD!

BUT IT'S THE ONLY THING THE POOR KID HAS IN LIFE, ELLEN! *LOOK*. IT'S GOING DOWN THE *SEWER!*

THEN HE SHOULD LISTEN WHEN I TELL HIM NOT TO TAKE IT OUTSIDE SHOULDN'T HE?

THE DOLL COST *FIVE DOLLARS*, DIDN'T IT, GERALD? AND NOW IT'S GONE. NOW IT'S *TRASH.*

I THINK PERHAPS YOU'D BETTER LOWER YOUR PANTS, GERALD...

I SAID, *"LOWER YOUR PANTS"*, GERALD. I *KNOW* YOU CAN HEAR ME DO AS I SAY. *DO AS I SAY, GERALD!!*

VERY WELL THEN... WE'LL JUST (UH.) *EXTEND* THE (UH) PUNISHMENT A LITTLE (UH) *LONGER!*

WHUP

SWEK

SLAP!

KLUMP

...BUT HE FOUND NOTHING THERE BUT THE SOFTNESS AND WETNESS AND A *BLACKNESS* DEEPER EVEN THAN HIS *OWN* BLINDNESS... SO HE LET THE THING WASH AWAY...

WHEN HE FIRST *SENSED* THE SMALL SOFT OBJECT TUMBLING AND BUMPING ALONG IN THE CURRENT, SEG SAT DOWN AND *CONCENTRATED* ON IT AND TRIED TO GET INSIDE ITS MIND...

GONE! HE'S *GONE!* LOOK, THE *WINDOW'S* OPEN.

HE'S *RUN AWAY*, ELLEN, I *KNEW* HE WOULD! I *WARNED* YOU!

I'LL CALL THE POLICE--

DON'T YOU *DARE!* I WON'T HAVE THE *HUMILIATION!*

WE CAN HANDLE OUR *OWN* AFFAIRS. C'MON. I KNOW WHERE THE LITTLE DEVIL'S GONE.

DRIP

DRIP

DRIP

HSSSSSS

SPLORSH

SPLORSH

SPLORSH

AAAARRGH!

AGH!

CHOMP!

THIS IS INSANE: THERE ARE RATS DOWN HERE IT'S DANGEROUS.

SHUT UP, WILLARD! HE'S DOWN HERE, I TELL YOU!

SLOOSH

SLOOSH

SPLOOSH

SPLOOSH

SEG LISTENED QUIETLY. THIS NEW CREATURE WAS ***BREATHING RAPIDLY*** AND SENSED ***UNCONTROLLED FEAR***, EMANATING FROM IT. SEG WONDERED IF HE SHOULD ***EAT*** THE NEW CREATURE...

PERHAPS... BUT IT MIGHT BE INTERESTING TO SEEP ***INSIDE*** THE CREATURE'S MIND ***FIRST***... YES, SEG THOUGHT, HE MIGHT ***TRY*** THAT...

WHAT'S *THAT?*

SOMETHING COMING RUNNING THROUGH THE SEWER!

SPLICK

SPLICK

SPLICK

GERALD! GERALD, OVER HERE, BOY!

SPLICK

LOOKS PALE AS A GHOST.

SPLICK

DID YOU *SEE* THAT, ELLEN? I COULD HAVE *SWORN* HE HEARD ME CALLING!

WAIT A MINUTE-- W--WHAT'S *THAT*--?

HOLY JUMPIN'--

GOD, WHAT *IS* IT?

ELLEN *WAIT!*

BLA-DOW WHAM!

...IT...MIGHT HAVE BEEN INTELLIGENT.

MASS OF *JELLY* NOW. *WHATEVER* IT WAS.

LET'S GET *OUT* OF HERE.

PAIN! FOR THE FIRST TIME *REAL PAIN!* *TERRIBLE* PAIN. YET SEG WAS JUST AS *AWARE* NOW AS HE'D EVER BEEN...

...HE JUST COULDN'T *MOVE ABOUT* ANYMORE...

SPLICK SPLICK..

THE SEWER WATER LIFTED H M UP AND WASHED H.M ALONG ON A BUBBLING RIDE...HE PASSED THROUGH FAMILIAR TUNNELS AND PIPES AND SOME NOT SO FAMILIAR...

TOWARD DAWN HE EMPTIED OUT OF A BIG PIPE INTO A ***CEMENT TRENCH.*** .T WAS RA.NG OUTSIDE...SEG M XED WITH THE RAINWATER AND ROLLED ON...

SEG FELT HIMSELF POURED FROM ONE CULVERT TO THE NEXT, THEN CAUGHT SUDDENLY IN THE WILD CURRENT OF A WIDE, WINDING ***RIVER***...

THE R.VER OVERFLOWED ITS BANKS AT ONE PO.NT, SEG FLOWED WITH IT...SOMETIME LATER HE FOUND HIMSELF SWIRLING QUIETLY IN A GENTLE TIDE POOL...

..THERE WAS THE DISTANT ***THRUMMING*** OF HEAVY MACHINERY...

SEG FLOATED...THE SUN CAME UP AND BEAT ***WARMLY*** ON HIS SURFACE, THEN WENT DOWN AGAIN, AND HE SENSED THE BR GHT STARS OVERHEAD...HE DR FTED LAZILY TOWARD A WIDE GATE, FELT HIMSELF ***FILTERED*** THROUGH A NARROW GRATING...

THEN ONCE MORE HE WAS IN A PIPE... ...A ***NARROW*** PIPE, A CLEAN, SH NY ***ALUMINUM*** PIPE...AND HE WAS MOV.NG VERY FAST...RUSHING,

RUSHING, RUSHING ***HEADLONG***...

GERALD?

WHAT DID I TELL YOU ABOUT DRINKING FROM MY GLASS GERALD?

GLOK GLUG GLUG

WHAT DID I TELL YOU, GERALD?

TWACK

ELLEN, PLEASE!

SEG LOOKED UP... LOOKED! HE COULD SEE! REALLY SEE!

PERHAPS A MORE EMPHATIC LESSON IS NEEDED DO YOU THINK SO, GERALD?

THE CREATURE TOOK HIM BY THE HAND... THE SAME CREATURE HE HAD HEARD EARLIER DOWN IN HIS HOME...

YES, I THINK THAT'S JUST WHAT WE NEED...

ELLEN PLEASE, NOT THE BELT!

IT WAS THIS CREATURE THAT HAD CAUSED HIM THE TERRIBLE PAIN WITH THE BLAST OF HEAT. SEG HADN'T LIKED THAT...

COME, GERALD... TAKE DOWN YOUR PANTS...

IT MIGHT BE INTERESTING TO SEEP INTO THIS CREATURE'S MIND, SEE WHY IT HAD DONE THAT TO HIM...

BEEEEEEEEP

...ON THE OTHER HAND, IT MIGHT BE JUST AS INTERESTING TO SEE...

AGHH

ELLEN?

...WHAT IT TASTED LIKE!

First Impressions

IT WAS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF OUR GRADUATION FROM OXFORD COLLEGE THAT CHILDS FIRST RELATED THE STORY. I HAD HIT UPON THE POSSIBILITY OF REUNITING ALL MY DEAREST COLLEAGUES FROM THOSE ADOLESCENT DAYS FOR A WEEKEND AT MY COUNTRY ESTATE. IT WAS A SPLENDID IDEA AS IT TURNED OUT, AND A RESOUNDING SUCCESS. ALL THE MORE SO BECAUSE CHILDS WAS THE ONE MEMBER OF OUR LITTLE CLUB I HADN'T BEEN ABLE TO CONTACT, YET HE MANAGED TO FIND THE PLACE JUST THE SAME! WE WERE ALL SO SURPRISED AND GLAD TO SEE HIM (NONE OF US HAD HEARD FROM HIM SINCE UNIVERSITY) THAT WE SCARCELY NOTICED, UPON HIS ENTRANCE, A VERY DISCERNABLE AND SEEMINGLY ANNOYING LIMP.

BUTCH GUICE

CHILDS! BY HEAVEN, THIS IS SPLENDID! COME IN OLD MAN, AND JOIN THE PARTY! YOU REMEMBER ALDISS, STRAUSS, MARLEY, AND BINGHAM! HERE, HAVE A CHAIR! SIT DOWN! POOLE, LET'S HAVE A DRINK FOR MR. CHILDS!

ISN'T THIS GLORIOUS! WHAT COULD BE MORE ENJOYABLE THAN TO BE SURROUNDED BY THE SINCERITY AND WARMTH OF GOOD, TRUSTING FRIENDS! AND THAT'S THE KEY, ISN'T IT, GENTLEMEN - TRUST! HOW RARE A COMMODITY IN TODAY'S TRANSPARENT WORLD!

VERY GOOD, SIR.

Story: **BRUCE JONES** Art: **BUTCH GUICE**
Lettering **CODY** Color **TOM LUTH**

TAKE MY MAN POOLE HERE, FOR INSTANCE! BEEN WITH THE FAMILY FOR A *GENERATION* AND THE VERY ESSENCE OF THE WORD "*TRUST*"! I'D STAKE MY VERY *LIFE* ON HIS HONESTY AND LOYALTY!

PLEASE, SIR, YOU *EMBARRASS* ME....

NONSENSE! IT'S...

I *SAY*, CHILDS, WHAT A *STUNNING* INSTRUMENT! FAMILY HEIRLOOM?

PARDON ME, GENTLEMEN, NEEDS WINDING...NO, SEARLS, *NOT* AN HEIRLOOM, I'M AFRAID. HARDLY THAT. THOUGH IT BEARS A HISTORY AS CONVOLUTED AS ANY FAMILY TREE...

YOUR TALK OF *TRUST* AND *LOYALTY* GIVES ME PAUSE, SEARLS OLD MAN. I WONDER HOW THE GROUP OF YOU WOULD REGARD YOUR OLD SCHOOL MATE IF I WERE TO RELATE THE ORIGINS OF THIS TIMEPIECE

FORGE *AHEAD*, CHILDS, WE'RE ALL EARS!

YES, YES, *INDEED!*

VERY WELL THEN AS YOU SURELY MUST REMEMBER, I QUIT OXFORD MY [illegible] OR YEAR TO PURSUE MY STUDIES AT BRIDWELL COLLEGE IN THE NORTH BRIDWELL, I FELT OFFERED A SUPERIOR COURSE IN ANATOMY

* IT WAS THERE THAT I WAS TO ENCOUNTER ONE PROFESSOR *LEHMAN HARKLEY*...AND THE BEGINNING OF MY GREATEST COLLEGIATE *STRUGGLE*. HARKLEY DETESTED ME FROM THE OUTSET...

--PRESENTING A BODY AND A PAIR OF RAMI, WHICH ARTICULATE WITH THE SKULL AT THE TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINTS...

MASTICATION IS THE LEAST OF THE MOUTH'S TALENTS--IT ALSO AIDS CONSIDERABLY IN THE FORMATION OF WORDS...EVEN THE ASKING OF *QUESTIONS*--A PHENOMENON OF WHICH OUR MR. *CHILDS* APPEARS SINGULARLY INCAPABLE...

HA-HA-HA-HA!

*THERE WAS NO GOOD REASON FOR HIS NEEDLING ME, TRUE I HAD SOME DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY IN THE COURSE, BUT HARKLEY'S CONSTANT BADGERING ONLY INCREASED MY FLOUNDERINGS. AT ANY RATE, I SOON GREW TO HATE HIM COMPLETELY

TIME'S UP, GENTLEMEN! CLASS DISMISSED!

"TOWARD THE END OF THE TERM MY GRADES PLUMMETED ADMITTEDLY, THEY WERE WEAK, BUT *NOT* AS WEAK AS HARKLEY MARKED THEM...

YOU MIGHT DO BETTER TO DALLY WITH TOMORROW'S *EXAMINATION* QUESTIONS, MR. CHILDS, THAN WITH THE LOCAL *FAUNA*...

YOU HAVE EXACTLY THIRTY MINUTES, GENTLEMEN.. YOU MAY BEGIN!

NATURALLY, I FAILED WHEN I LEARNED OF MY GRADES, I STORMED ACROSS CAMPUS TO VOICE MY COMPLAINT TO HARKLEY'S SMUG FACE I NEVER GOT THE *CHANCE*, HOWEVER EVER... *FATE* HAD SEEN TO THAT..

HOW'D IT HAPPEN?

HEART ATTACK..

"I HAD SPENT ALL MY MONEY ON TUITION AND HARKLEY HAD WASHED ME OUT. I WAS *PENNILESS* AND *DIPLOMALESS*. I WANTED MORE THAN ANYTHING TO RETURN THE PAIN AND HUMILIATION THIS MAN HAD INFLICTED UPON ME... YET *HOW*?

"I WAS YOUNG I WAS FOOLISH I WAS MORTIFIED BEYOND MEASURE I TOOK A JOB AS A DISHWASHER IN A LOCAL PUB WHILE MY HATRED FANNED EVER *HIGHER*

"THEN... MONTHS LATER, I RESOLVED TO DO THAT WHICH I HAVE SPENT THESE PAST DECADES REGRETTING... TO *DESECRATE* HARKLEY'S GRAVE.

"IT WAS A FULL MOON. I FOUND THE COFFIN EASILY.

...DEAR GOD...

"HARKLEY HAD RUINED MY FIRST ATTEMPTS AT AN EDUCATION...

--NOW HE CAN BUY ME A *SECOND CHANCE*.!

"I WAS EXAMINING THE BEAUTIFULLY WROUGHT GOLD CASING THERE IN THE MOONLIGHT WHEN I FIRST FELT THAT TERRIBLE *SEARING PAIN* IN MY ANKLE ..

AGH.!

GOOD CHRIST.!

"THE PAIN WAS *INDESCRIBABLE* I TORE FRANTICALLY AT THE MAGGOT EATEN MOUTH, BUT THE CRUEL YELLOW TEETH OF THE THING HELD FAST...

UH-H.!

"THE MORE I STRUGGLED WITH THE GRINNING HORROR, THE *TIGHTER* THOSE TERRIBLE TEETH BIT INTO MY AGONIZED FLESH...

OH GOD... SOMEBODY *HELP ME*.!

WHACK.! CRUNCH.!

"BUT THERE WAS NO ONE TO WHOM I COULD GO--*GRAVE ROBBERS* WERE DEALT WITH SWIFTLY IN THAT PROVINCE... I WAS FINALLY OBLIGED TO GRAB UP THE *SHOVEL*...

"THE BLOWS RID ME OF THE FOUL-SMELLING BODY, BUT *NOT*, ALAS, THE *HEAD*...

...THE *PAIN!* ...OH, GOD, THE *PAIN!*...

"QUICKLY I LEARNED THAT AS LONG AS I DID NOT ATTEMPT TO *REMOVE* THE HEAD, THE PAIN WAS BEARABLE. I HASTILY COVERED THE GRAVE AGAIN AND QUIT THE PLACE...

R.I.P.

"I HURRIED TO MY FLAT WHERE, THROUGH UNTOLD AGONY, I MANAGED TO REMOVE ALL BUT THE CLUTCHING MANDIBLES... WHEN I ATTEMPTED TO PULL THESE FREE, THE THING BIT SO *DEEPLY* INTO THE FLESH THAT THE PAIN MADE ME *PASS OUT*...

"THEN SOMETHING CAME TO MIND: THE *WATCH!* I STILL HAD THE *WATCH!* PERHAPS THE CREATURE COULD BE APPEASED IF I RIDDED MYSELF OF HARKLEY'S GOLD TIMEPIECE. I FLUNG IT QUICKLY IN THE BRUSH OUTSIDE...

"IMAGINE MY HORROR WHEN, UPON AWAKENING THE FOLLOWING DAWN, I FOUND THE DREADED INSTRUMENT LYING NEATLY ATOP MY *BEDSIDE TABLE*...

NO!

"EACH TIME I ATTEMPTED TO RID MYSELF OF THE CURSED THING IT *REAPPEARED* SOON AFTER, NOR WAS MY LUCK AT REMOVING THE CLENCHING TEETH ANY GREATER. I COULD NOT CONTACT A SURGEON FOR FEAR THE POLICE MIGHT TRACE HARKLEY'S *DENTAL RECORDS*...

"I TOOK TO DRINK, WANDERING FROM ONE ILL-PAYING JOB TO THE NEXT. EVERY STEP A LANCING TORTURE A REMINDER OF THAT HELLISH NIGHT IN THE GRAVE YARD. THE YEARS PASSED... THE WATCH AND TEETH REMAINED...

...WHICH BRINGS US TO THE PRESENT, GENTLEMEN.

GOOD GOD, CHILDS, WHAT A GRISLY TALE!

THANK YOU, POOLE WHAT DID YOU THINK OF MY STORY?

RIPPING, SIR! BITING ENDING!

THAT DID IT. THE SOBER, SOUNDLESS ROOM ERUPTED ABRUPTLY INTO UNBRIDLED LAUGHTER..

HAHA HAHAHA!

CHILDS, YOU OLD DOG! I KNEW IT WAS MADE UP ALL ALONG!

HOW DID YOU GET THAT GAMEY LEG?

BLOODY *RIDING HORSE* KICKED ME AT BRIDWELL! HAD THIS *LIMP* EVER SINCE! WATCH BELONGED TO MY GRANDPAPA!

GOODNIGHT, GENTLEMEN! THAT'S *ENOUGH* GHOST STORIES FOR ONE EVENING!

IT MUST HAVE BEEN PAST THREE IN THE MORNING WHEN THE TERRIBLE, WAILING, HYSTERICAL LAUGHTER AWAKENED US...

HA-HA-HA-HA-HA! GONE! HA-HA! GONE! GONE!

WE RUSHED TO THE SOURCE OF THE UNCONTROLLED TITTERING: CHILDS' ROOM..

GONE! HA-HA! THE CURSED THING IS GONE!

GOOD GOD, LOOK AT HIS LEG!

TEETH MARKS!

THAT'S WHEN THE SECOND TERRIFYING SCREAM CUT THROUGH THE HOUSE

WHAT THE DEVIL--

AAAA

AN Unsettling INCIDENT

RICK GEARY
©1984

HERE AT MY COTTAGE, A STRANGE EVENT OCCURRED WHICH I STILL CANNOT DECIPHER.

ON TUES. MORNING, 22 MAR. 1735, I CHOPPED SOME WOOD.

I THEN CLIMBED TO THE PEAK OF MY ROOF.

AND SAT THERE FOR SEVERAL HOURS — I KNOW NOT WHY.

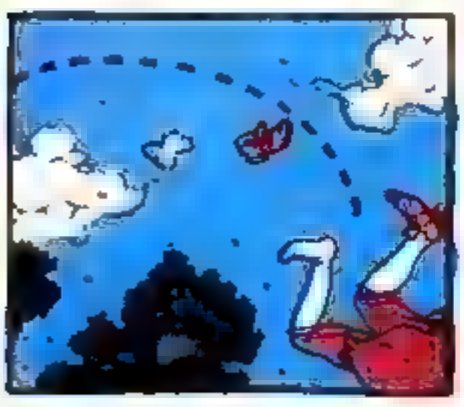
THE COUNTRY SPREAD OUT BENEATH ME.

MY WIFE AND HER SISTER WERE GREATLY PERPLEXED.

THEIR ENTREATIES FAILED TO BUDGE ME . . .

AS DID THOSE OF SEVERAL PASSING TOWNSPEOPLE.

AT LAST I GAVE A MIGHTY LEAP . . .


THE ARC OF MY DESCENT.

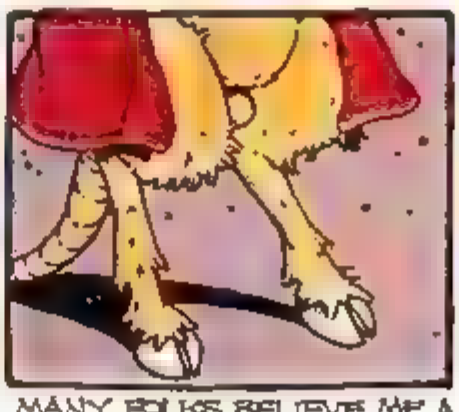
UPON LANDING, I GRABBED MY NEARBY AXE . . .

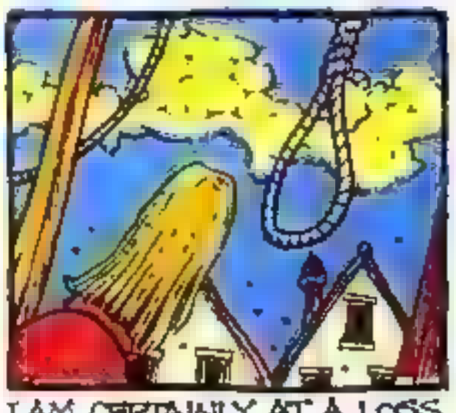
AND WITH IT BELABORED MY WIFE AND HER SISTER.

THIS, NEAR AS I COULD TELL, WAS AT ABOUT 4:15 P.M.

I THEN PUT THEM IN THE COTTAGE AND SET IT AFIRE.

I NEVER BEFORE HAD EXHIBITED SUCH BEHAVIOR.


MANY FOLKS BELIEVE ME A TOOL OF SATAN.


I AM CERTAINLY AT A LOSS AS TO EXPLAIN MY ACTIONS.

WILLIAM F. NOLAN'S

THE PARTY

DAVID WHITNEY ASHLAND. AGE 42. HEIR TO HIS FATHER'S FORTUNE.. HANDSOME, WITTY TOTALLY OCCUPIED WITH "THE GOOD LIFE." PRESENTLY MARRIED TO LYDIA ELAINE HOLLISTER 31 FORMER MODEL AND FASHION EDITOR-- NOW A FRUSTRATED SOCIAL CLIMBER ON THE LADDER OF WEALTH...

CONGRATULATIONS, DAVID. AS USUAL YOU MANAGED TO MAKE A TOTAL FOOL OF YOURSELF

I WAS BEING FUNNY. I'M ALWAYS FUNNY AT PARTIES.

DO YOU ACTUALLY THINK IT'S *FUNNY* TO POUR A WHISKEY SOUR ALL OVER THE HOSTESS..

SPILLING THE DRINK WAS AN ACCIDENT I WAS TRYING TO CLIMB UP ON THE PIANO TO SING

YOUR SONGS ARE VULGAR AND DISGUSTING

I'LL TELL YOU WHAT WAS VULGAR AND DISGUSTING--THE WAY YOU WENT AFTER THAT GUITAR PLAYER

I HAVE TO FIND AFFECTION SOMEWHERE GOD KNOWS *YOU* DON'T SUPPLY IT.

YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE OUT IN THIS WORLD SWEETIE AND YOU'RE A MIGHTY COLD FISH

Story **WILLIAM F. NOLAN** Art **MIKE HOFFMAN**
Letters. **CARRIE McCARTHY** Color: **JOE CHIODO**

HOW CAN YOU EXPECT ANYTHING *BUT* COLDNESS? THIS KIND OF LIFE... IT KILLED YOUR FIRST WIFE

TRISH DRANK HERSELF TO DEATH. YOU KNOW THAT AS WELL AS I DO...

YOU PUSHED HER OVER THE EDGE DAVID SHE KEPT DRINKING MORE AND THE TIME JUST TO KEEP FROM GOING CRAZY--

--THE SAME WAY *I* DO

DON'T GIVE ME THAT. YOU DRINK BECAUSE YOU *LIKE* IT NOBODY PUTS A GUN TO YOUR HEAD.

DAVID I'M GOING TO DIVORCE YOU.

FINE. OKAY OKAY I DON'T NEED YOU. I NEVER DID

NO ALL YOU NEED IS ANOTHER PARTY ANOTHER VODKA MARTINI ANOTHER CROWD TO PLAY THE FOOL FOR

LOOK IF YOU WANT A DIVORCE YOU'VE GOT IT WITH MY BLESSING BUT JUST SHUT UP ABOUT WHAT I NEED.

SYLVIA LOOK OUT.

EEEEEE

SKREEE

WHAT HAPPENED? CAN'T SEE A DAMN THING OUT THERE.

SORRY ABOUT THAT MR. ASHLAND MY FAULT ENTIRELY

THAT WAS CLOSE

LET'S FORGET THERE ALMOST HOME.

AREN'T YOU COMING?

NO--I'M GOING TO MY SISTER'S, MAYBE OR DOWNTOWN. I JUST DON'T FEEL LIKE GOING INSIDE THAT HOUSE WITH YOU TONIGHT.

SIDNEY WILL BRING YOU THE CAR AFTER HE'S DROPPED ME OFF.

SUIT YOURSELF. I'M GOING IN AND HAVE A DRINK.

NOW **WHERE** HAVE I HEARD THAT LINE BEFORE?

SOMETIME LATER...

WHAT IS IT SIDNEY? WHAT'S THIS?

MRS. ASHLAND WANTS YOU TO JOIN HER...

JOIN HER? IT'S AFTER THREE IN THE MORNING.

WELL, WHAT-THE-HELL... I'VE NEVER TURNED DOWN ONE YET. I'LL GET MY COAT.

David~

Please forgive me for my wretched behavior tonight. I didn't really mean what I said to you. Guess I just had too much to drink.

I'm sending back Sidney to fetch you to this marvelous party I discovered. You'll adore it!

See you there, darling!

L.

--T'S A NEW APARTMENT BUILDING DOWNTOWN...THAT'S ALL I CAN TELL YOU SIR. MRS ASHLAND WANTS TO SURPR SE YOU.

YOU'RE BEING VERY MYSTERIOUS, SIDNEY.

--BJT I M ALWAYS GAME FOR A SURPRISE DR VE ON, McDUFF.

WHERE'S THE PARTY? WHAT FLOOR?

T'S IN 10-E HAVE A GOOD T ME, MR. ASHLAND...

HI, FELLA! C'MON N JOIN THE PARTY!

HE...O THERE! MY, BUT YOU LOOK JLST LIKE A MAN I SAW ONCE, OUTS.DE THE LIBRARY, WHEN I WAS A CHI_D. HE WAS SIT- TING ON A _TT_E STONE BENCH, I REMEMBER--

--AND HE HAD HIS THROAT CUT.

EXCUSE ME IM LOOKING FOR MY WIFE. .

MY NAME'S VIV. I DR NK.

JH...THAT S N CE...

NO T ISN T NICE. NOT AT *THIS* LOLSY PARTY .T ISN T. I KEEP DRINKING BUT I CAN T GET SMASHED.

I M LOOKING FOR MY W FE. MAYBE YOL MET HER...-YD A ASHLAND?

SORRY--BLT I NEVER HELP HLS- BANDS FIND THE.R W VES. BYE-BYE.

IF YOU WISH TO MAINTA N YOLR HEA_TH YOL CAN T JLST *STAND* THERE. KEEP MOV'NG.' STAY AHEAD OF 'EM. STAND STI_L AND THEY'_L FORM THE.R C_OLD!

WHO W__?

THE GERMS. THEY FORM CLOUDS AROUND PEOPLE. F YOU DON T KEEP MOVING THEY GANG UP ON YOU. FORM A GERM-CLOUD. BILLIONS OF EM. THEY CAN CAUSE FLU. EVER HAD THE FLU?

OF COURSE. I--

THAT S CUZ PEOPLE DON T KEEP MOVING. BETTER GET TROTTING FELLA!

I PREFER TO REMAIN WHERE I AM.

AT LEAST YOU VE BEEN WARNED.

SOME PEOPLE NEVER LEARN...

HER NAME S "BABY"... SHE LIKES TO RUB HER HEAD AGAINST YOUR NECK. HOPE YOU RE NOT AFRAID OF SNAKES.

I...UH...CAN T SAY THAT I M *FOND* OF THEM...

SHE S REALLY VERY LOVELY. WANT TO HOLD HER?

NO...NO THANKS...

L GHT?

YOU SEEM ALONE.

NO... MY WIFE S HERE SOMEWHERE...

I HAVEN T BEEN ALONE SINCE MILWAUKEE. I WAS ABOUT 14 OR SOMETHING AND TH S CREEP MOVES IN WITH ME. MY PARENTS WERE DEAD THEN.

I'M SORRY.

YEAH, THIS CREEP WAS SORRY TOO. THINGS WERE BAD RIGHT FROM THE START BETWEEN US. THAT'S WHY I KILLED HIM.

YOU WHAT?

SHOT HIM. THREE TIMES BANG. BANG. BANG. IT WAS SELF-DEFENSE. HE CAME AT ME WITH AN IRON GOLF CLUB. HE WAS A GOLFER.

I'D BETTER TRY TO FIND MY WIFE.

I LOST A WIFE ONCE. GREEK BELLY-DANCER WITH A JERSEY ACCENT. SHE USED TO QUOTE THE LINE OF HEMINGWAY'S TO FITZGERALD: "WE'RE ALL B.TCHED FROM THE START". B.TTER LINE...

-M-MUST FIND MY WIFE

DO YOU WORRY A LOT? I DO. RUNS IN THE FAMILY. MOTHER USED TO WORRY ABOUT THE EARTH SLOWING DOWN. I'M A SALESMAN. MEET A LOT OF FRUITCAKES IN THIS GAME. SOLD A POLICY ONCE TO A GUY WHO SPENT ALL HIS TIME INSIDE THIS FOLD-AWAY BED--

I KNEW A MAN WHO WAS *TWICE* THAT CRAZY... LIVED IN VERMONT, BELIEVED IN FALLING GRANDMOTHERS. "WATCH OUT FOR FALLING GRANDMOTHERS" HE USED TO TELL ME. "THEY COME DOWN PRETTY HEAVY IN WINTER IN THIS AREA..."

FRUITCAKE. I KNOW THE KIND.

I HAVE A THEORY ABOUT SLEEP: WE ALL GO INSANE EACH NIGHT. WE LIE THERE HELPLESS AT NIGHT WHILE OUR SUBCONSCIOUS PUSHES US OFF HIGH BUILDINGS, IN FRONT OF SPEEDING TRAINS, BURIES US IN QUICKSAND--

I-I NEED TO FIND MY WIFE--

LOOKING FOR MRS. ASHLAND?

SIDNEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING AT THE PARTY?

I WAS INVITED. WE WERE *ALL* INVITED...

SIDNEY! DAMN YOU! COME BACK HERE!

BEEN LOOKING FOR ME?

LYD'A! W-WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? THIS PARTY... IT'S INSANE. ABSOLUTELY *HORRIBLE!*

BUT DAVID, I THOUGHT YOU *ADORED* PARTIES.

LET'S JUST GET OUT OF THIS BUILDING. I'VE HAD ENOUGH.

HI, LOVER LONG TIME NO SEE. GOT A LITTLE KISS FOR YOUR *FIRST* W FEY-POO?

TRISH!

HAVING A GOOD TIME? DRINKS ARE LOUSY. NO KICK. THAT'S THE HELL OF IT-ALL THE BOOZE IS WATERED.

T-THAT TRUCK...ON THE FREE-WAY...

IT *HIT* US, DAVID.

AND NOW WE'RE ALL--

WE ARE, BUT NOT YOU. NOT YET.

DON'T FIGHT IT, DAVID. JUST LET GO.

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO MAKE IT...NOT BACK OUTSIDE.

NO! *NO!*

BEEEEEEEEEE

NO!!

HELP ME SOMEBODY HELP ME!

H., FELLA. COME IN! JOIN THE PARTY!

THE END

OKAY, ENOUGH PROCRASTINATING... I'VE WASHED ALL THE DISHES, WATCHED "GILLIGAN'S ISLAND", RE-ARRANGED MY PAPERBACKS AND CHECKED THE MAIL-BOX SIX TIMES...

...NONE OF WHICH HAS PUT THE DEADLINE FOR THIS JOB BACK A SINGLE DAY...

IT'S TIME TO SIT DOWN AND FACE THAT DREADED BLANK PAGE...

WORD BLUES

C'MON PETE, GET A GRIP ON YOURSELF, THE WELL NEVER RUNS DRY... HOW ABOUT A NICE JACK-THE-RIPPER TALE! *YEAH!*

"...AND-THE-SINISTER-SHAPE-OF-THE-RIPPER-GLIDED-UNDETECTED-THROUGH-THE-FOG-ENSHROUDED--"

TACKA TACKA TACKA

ECKANKAR LAOS EGRI

STRESS IN A

enriquez

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: THOM ENRIQUEZ
Coloring Joe Chioda & Chris Miller Lettering Thom Enriquez

HM-M...ON SECOND THOUGHT, EVERYONE'S DONE JACK-THE-RIPPER...

SKRAAK

RIIIP

LESSEE... HOW ABOUT A GOOD OLD FASHIONED WERE-WOLF STORY...

"...THE-LITHESOME-LYCANTHROPE-LIMPED-LURIDLY-THROUGH-THE-LANGUID-L--"

TAUKA TAUKA

SHEESH! ANOTHER PARAGRAPH OF THIS AND I'LL END UP WITH A PERMANENT LISP!

CRUNCH MUNCH

AH, I HAVE IT! A CREEPING DEAD STORY! THAT'S IT!

"--THE TEETERING-OBSCENITY-CRAWLED-CLUMSILY-FROM-THE-GRAVE-MAGGOTY-SHARDS-OF-MOULDERING-FLESH-DRIPPING-FROM-ITS-PUTRESCENT--"

KLAK KLAK KLAK KLAK KLEK

KLAK KLAK

DRUMP

RRRRH

DRUMP

NAH! EVERYONE WOULD ACCUSE ME OF RIPPING OFF E C....

MAYBE I OUGHTA APPROACH THIS THING FROM ANOTHER ANGLE...

I'LL START WITH A SEEMINGLY INNOCENT SCENE, THEN SEGUE ABRUPTLY INTO A SUDDEN GOUT OF CRAWLING HORROR!

"--SHE-WAS-A-LOVELY-GIRL,-SLIM-AND-STATUESQUE-AND-POISED. YET-SHE-LONGED-DESPERATELY-FOR-THE-TOUCH-OF-A-REAL-MAN--"

"--SHE-HAD-THIS-THING-FOR-WRITERS..... IT-WAS-UN-CONTROLLABLE...EVEN-THE-THOUGHT-OF-A-WRITER-SET-HER-OFF...."

GRRRR..

MMOH, TOO CORNY! WOMEN LIKE THAT DON'T REALLY--

--EXIST (GULP!)

TACKA-TACKA-TACKA-TACKA

WHAT TH--MPH!

SMEECH

DRAG

WHOEVER IT IS, GO AWAY-- I'M RIGHT ON DEADLINE--

TOM! GET OVER HERE *FAST*! YOU WON'T *BELIEVE* THIS!

FRAZETTA'S DOING COMICS AGAIN?

DRING

SQUEEK

COME IN. .

KNOCK KNOCK

HI YA, OL' BUDDY! JOIN THE *PARTY*!

HOLY JUMPIN'--

--AND ALL YOU DO IS *TYPE* WHAT YOU WANT?

SIMPLE AS THAT! YOU LIKE *BRUNETTES*, RIGHT? OKAY....

KLAK KLAK

PRESTO!

GOOD LORD...

OH!

KINDA SHORT-LEGGED..HERE...

TAOKA TAOKA TAOKA

SHRIIIIK!

THIS IS INCREDIBLE! LISTEN, I NEED A NEW FISHING REEL AND MY DISHWASHER'S ON THE BLINK AND--

WAIT A MINUTE! WHAT ARE WE DOING? THIS CAN'T BE REAL! IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! ALL OF IT!

IMPOSSIBLE?

IT'S LIKE SOMETHING YOU'D READ IN A COMIC BO--

GOOD GOD, THAT'S IT! WE ARE IN A COMIC BOOK! PETE, LOOK! LOOK OUT THERE!

(GULP!)... S-SOMEONE'S R-READING US...

--LOOKS LIKE A COMIC SHOP RACK BEHIND HIM... WONDER IF HE'S GOING TO BUY US ..

I THOUGHT THAT TYPEWRITER LOOKED FAMILIAR!

LOOK HERE IN TWISTED TALES #3, "OFF KEY," DRAWN BY DOUG WILDEY--IT'S THE SAME CRUMMY PLOT!

HOW 'BOUT MONSTERS? BATTLING MONSTERS! EVERYONE LIKES VIOLENCE!

MY GOD, PETE! QUICK! TYPE SOMETHING! ANYTHING! IF WE LOSE THE READERS INTEREST HE'LL STOP READING--WE'LL DIE!

I KNEW THAT GUY JONES WAS RUNNING DRY...

TAOKA TAOKA

IT'S NO GOOD--THEY'VE SEEN IT ALL *BEFORE!*

WELL *THINK* OF SOMETHING! *YOU'RE* AN ARTIST! WHAT KEEPS A PERSON'S *INTEREST* THESE DAYS?

NO! NO! STOP! THAT'S *TOO* INTERESTING! HE'LL WANT TO SEE THE *NEXT* PANEL, HE'LL FINISH THE STORY IN AN *INSTANT!*

OO!

RRIIIP

WHUP!

IT'S TOO *LATE*, WE'RE ALREADY ON THE LAST PAGE! WE'RE OUT OF *SPACE!* WHY THE HELL DIDN'T HE GIVE ENRIQUEZ A *LONGER* SCRIPT!!

WE'RE GOING TO *DIE!* WE'RE GOING TO *DIE!* *AGGGHHHHH!!*

WAIT A MINUTE...PEOPLE *COLLECT* COMIC BOOKS! THEY DON'T THROW THEM AWAY! THEY READ THEM *OVER* AND *OVER!* WE'LL LIVE *AGAIN* EVERY TIME SOMEONE PICKS THIS ISSUE UP!

YEAH! WE SHOULDN'T BE ACTING MISERABLE... WE SHOULD BE HAVING THE BEST TIME WE COULD POSSIBLY *HAVE!*

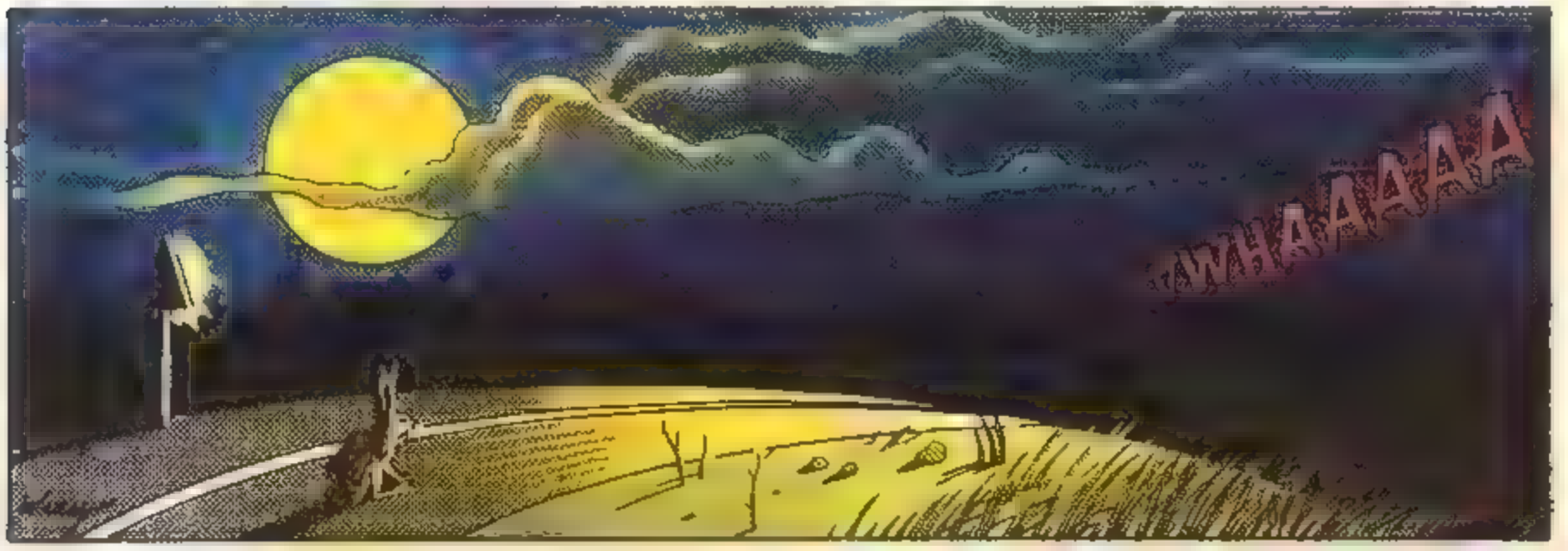
EEE-HAH!

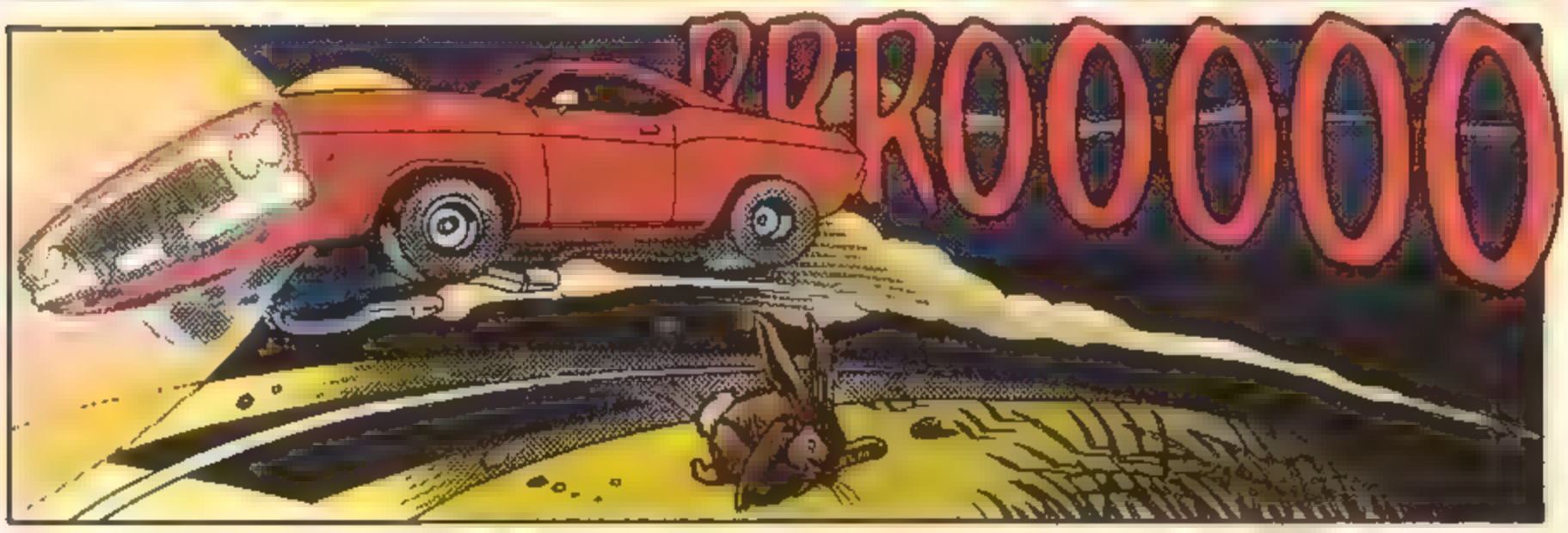
YA-HOO!

HEY YOU--STANDING THERE IN THE COMIC STORE READING FOR FREE-- *PAY UP!* THIS AIN'T NO *LIBRARY!*

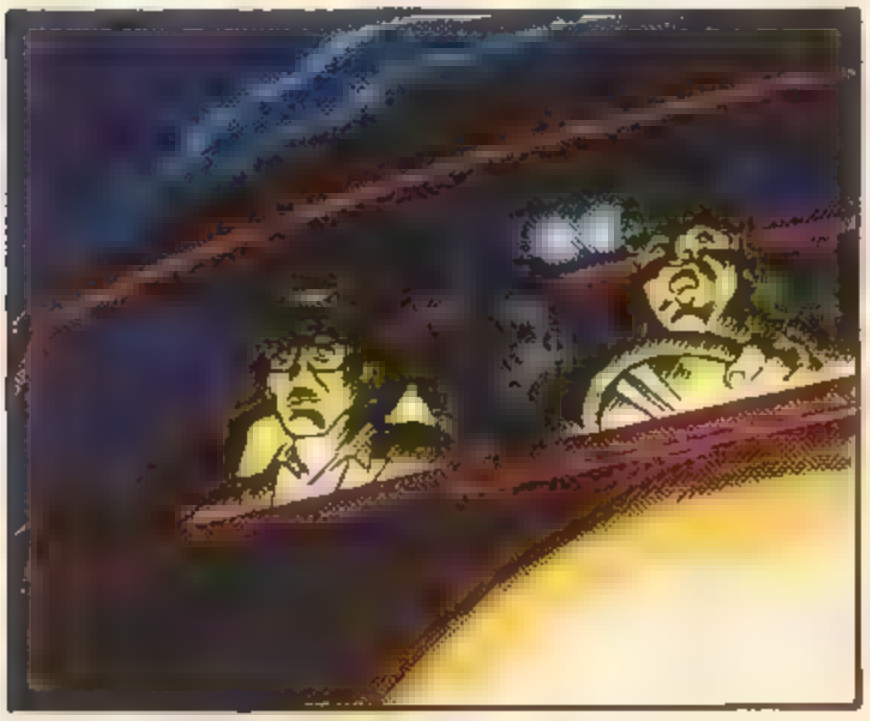
DEADLIGHTS

IT WAS LATE, AROUND MIDNIGHT. BOB, DEAN, AND I WERE HEADING BACK HOME TO BELOIT IN BOB'S DODGE CHALLENGER. IT WAS A FAST CAR, SO WE USUALLY TOOK IT. DEAN'S CAR WASN'T EXACTLY SLOW, BUT HE KEPT MESSING IT UP AND IT WAS IN THE GARAGE NOW WITH A CARBURETOR PROBLEM AND WOULDN'T BE READY TILL MORNING. I NEVER TEASED DEAN MUCH ABOUT HIS MUSTANG BECAUSE IT WAS BETTER THAN WHAT I HAD, WHICH WAS NOTH NG...

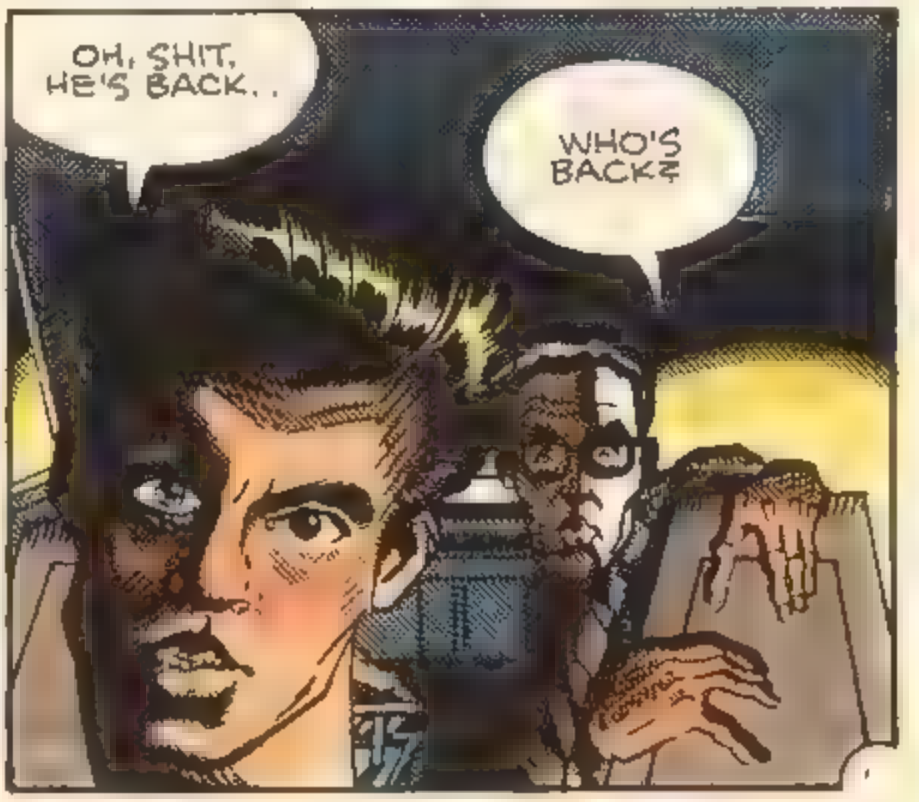




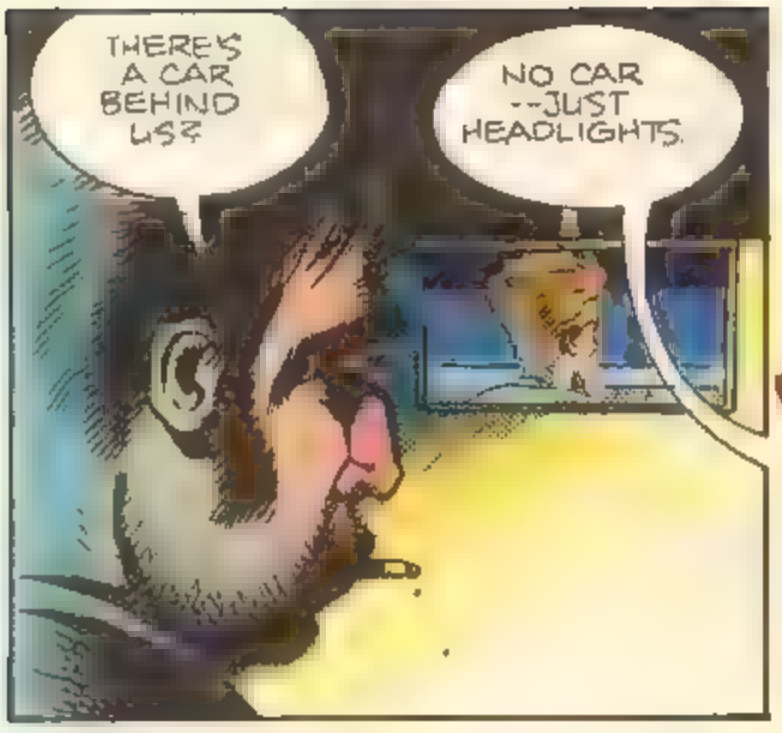
DEAN SAT IN BACK, POUTING OVER HIS RECENT BREAK-UP WITH HIS GIRLFR.END LORI. BOB AND I WERE UP FRONT. LED ZEPPELIN BLASTED ON THE EIGHT-TRACK. WHEAT FIELDS AND M LO CANE WENT BY IN THE DARK FLANKING U S. 24...



DEAN HAD SAID "SHIT" IN THE BACK SEAT, BUT BOB AND I DIDN'T PAY ANY ATTENTION TO HIM AS HE WAS PROBABLY STILL UPSET ABOUT LORI...

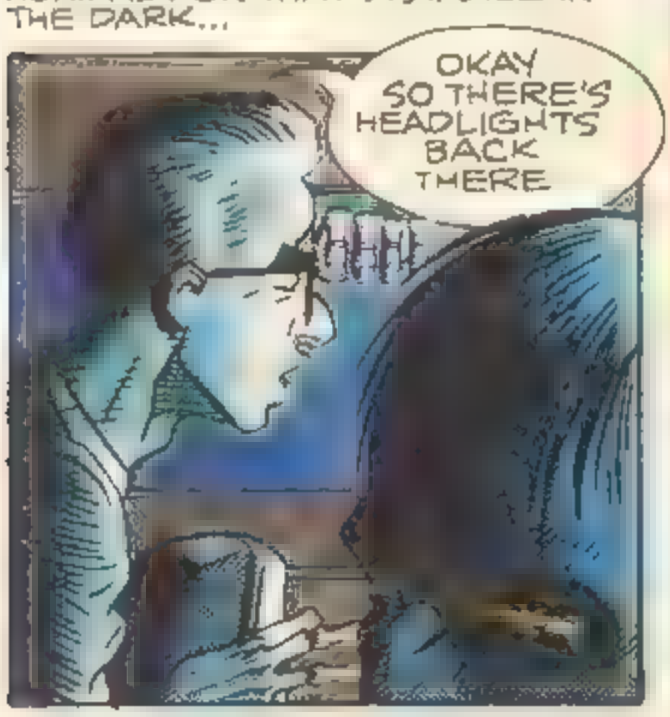


STORY: CHARLES WAGNER ART: BILL WRAY
Coloring Bill Wray Lettering John Workman



A MONTH BEFORE, DEAN HAD TOLD US SOME SHIT-STORY ABOUT BEING FOLLOWED BY HEADLIGHTS THAT HAD NO CAR MAKING THEM. IT WAS A STORY A COUPLE OF OTHERS AROUND TOWN HAD MUMBLED-- DRUNK KIDS TRYING TO EXPLAIN WHY THEY WERE OUT LATE BY SWITCHING THE SUBJECT TO GHOSTLY HEADLIGHTS...

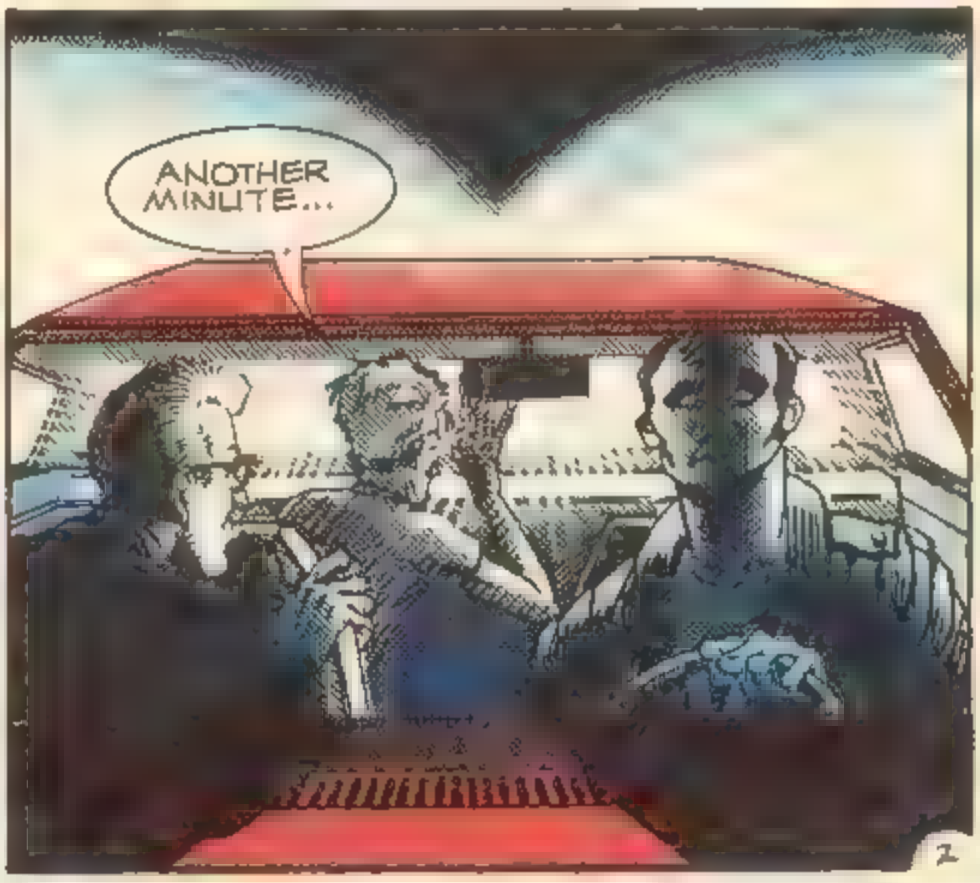
LIKE A LOT OF THINGS DEAN SAID, WE TOOK IT WITH A GRAIN OF SALT. I SQUINTED HARD AND SAW ONLY HEADLIGHTS. WHICH WAS NORMAL FOR THAT DISTANCE IN THE DARK...

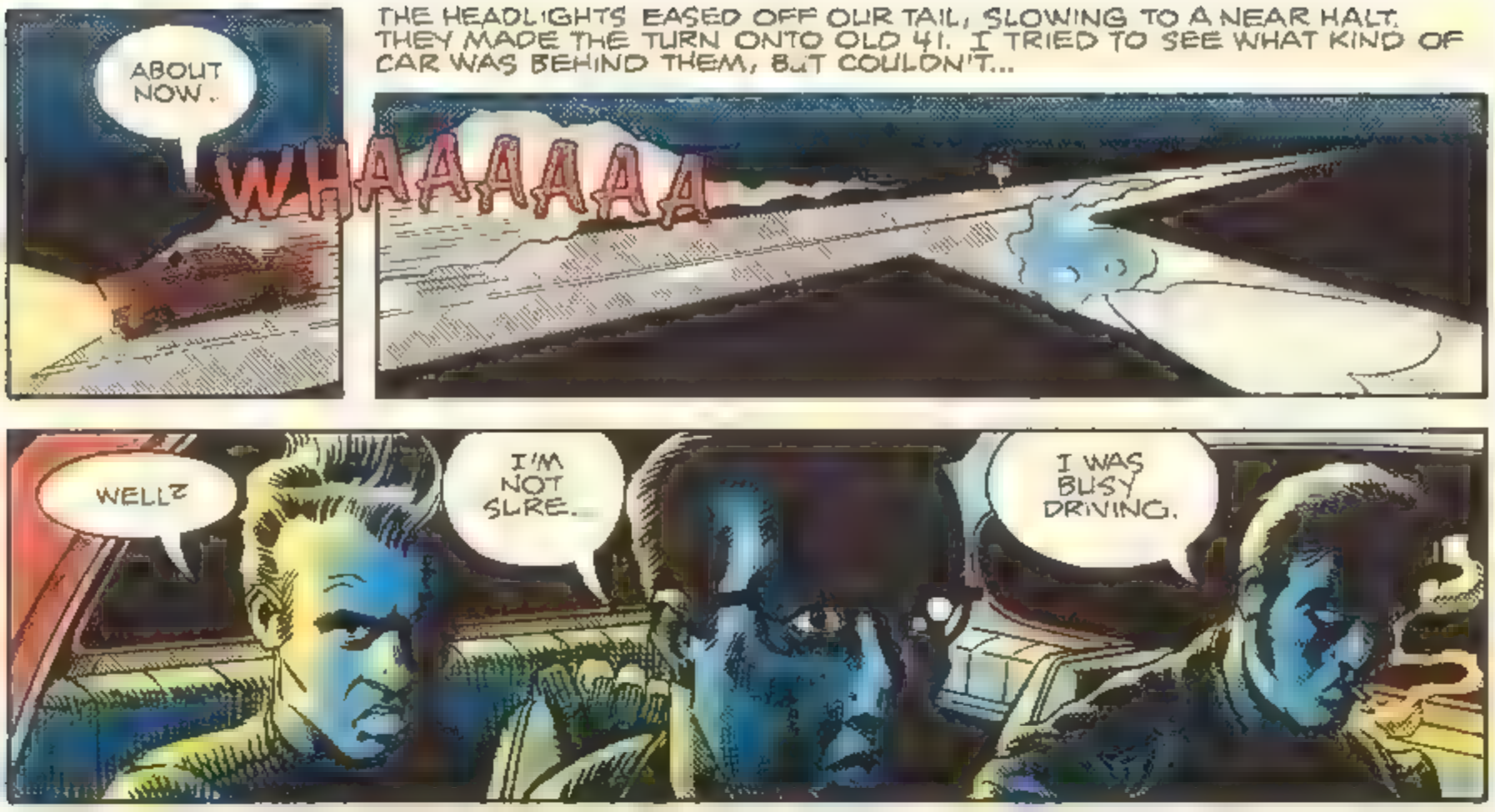


THE HEADLIGHTS BEGAN TO GAIN ON US.. "COMMUNICATIONS BREAKDOWN" POURED OUT OF THE SPEAKERS..

DEAN WAS RIGHT. THE BRIGHT BEAMS GLANCED OFF THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR INTO BOB'S EYES..

THE CABIN OF BOB'S CHALLENGER GREW BRIGHT AS DAY. DEAN SEEMED TO BE TRYING TO MERGE WITH THE CAR SEAT. BOB MOTIONED FOR THE CAR TO PASS, BUT THE LIGHTS STAYED GLUED TO OUR FENDER...




ABOUT NOW.
WHAAAAAAA
THE HEADLIGHTS EASED OFF OUR TAIL, SLOWING TO A NEAR HALT. THEY MADE THE TURN ONTO OLD 41. I TRIED TO SEE WHAT KIND OF CAR WAS BEHIND THEM, BUT COULDN'T...
WELL?
I'M NOT SURE...
I WAS BUSY DRIVING.

BOB CAME OVER TO MY PLACE THAT SATURDAY FOR A GAME OF HORSE WE WERE SHOOTING THE BALL WELL THAT DAY, WITH OUR SHIRTS OFF, HOPING TO START OUR SUMMER TANS..

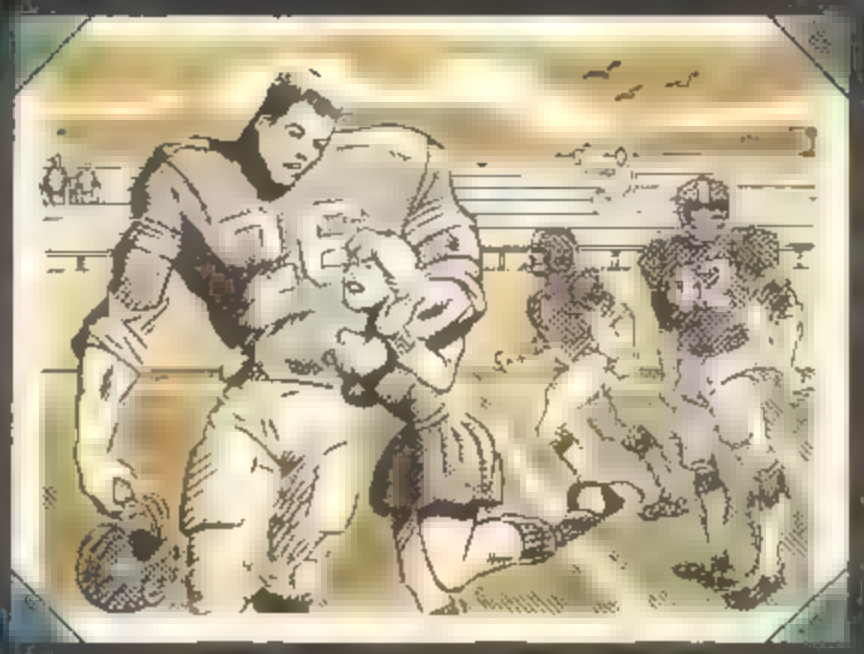
DEAN'S CAR SWUNG INTO THE DRIVE AND PULLED UP TO THE WEST SIDE OF THE COURT. DEAN STEPPED OUT WITH A FLOURISH THE PERENNIAL BANNER DRIVE-IN GLASS OF COKE IN HIS HAND

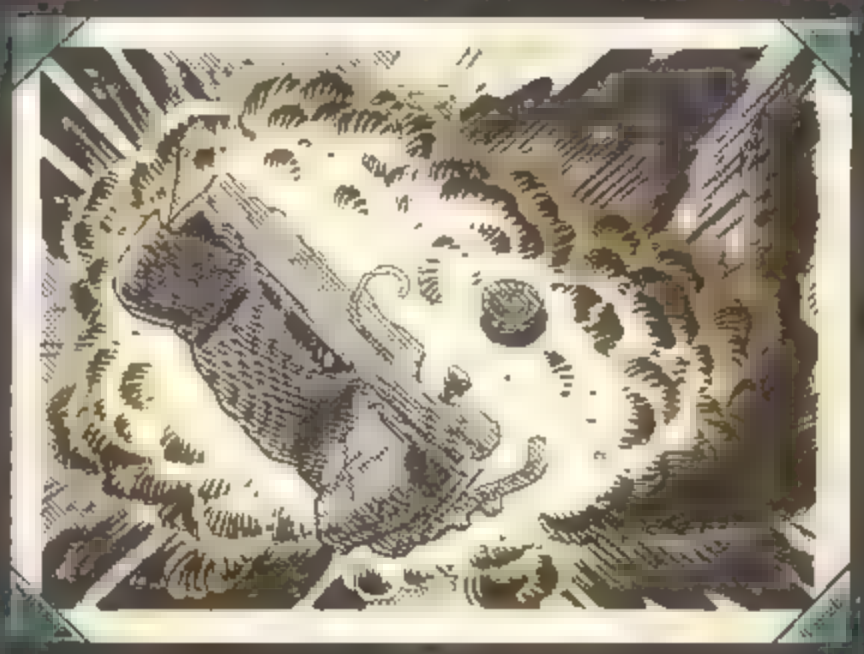
HE SAUNTERED COOLY OVER WHILE SUCKING ON HIS COKE..

SOMETHIN' ABOUT THOSE HEAD-LIGHTS...
SOME GUY GOT KILLED IN A WRECK TWENTY YEARS AGO OUT BY THE OLD 41 TURN-OFF. MY DAD TOLD ME ABOLT IT.

I WON'T REPEAT DEAN'S VERSION OF THE [illegible] SINCE THAT SATURDAY, I'VE STUDIED THE INCIDENT AND HERE'S WHAT THE PAPERS REPORTED: THERE WAS A GUY NAMED BILL PHILLIPS. HIS FRIENDS CALLED HIM TANK BECAUSE [illegible]

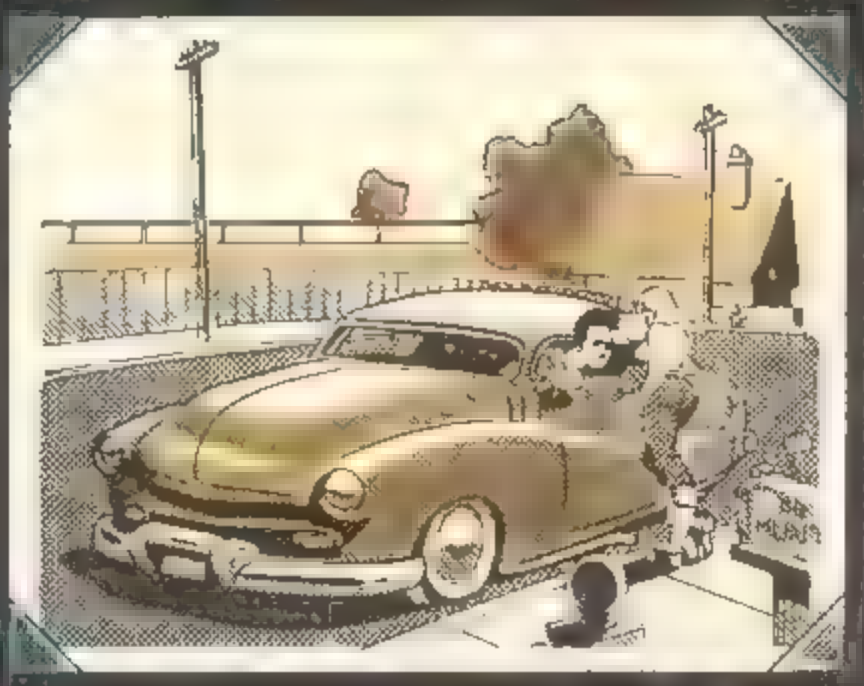
[illegible] AND [illegible] BHA GRAD HE'D BEEN DRIVING BACK FROM GLASCO IN A BIG HURRY AND APPARENTLY TRIED TO TURN ONTO OLD 41. HE WAS GOING TOO FAST AND ROLLED HIS MERC

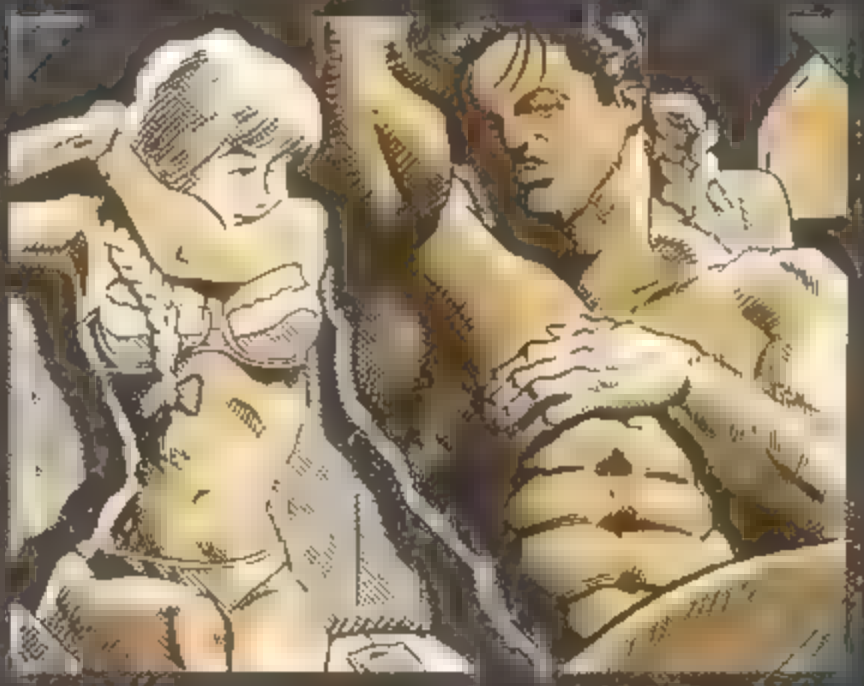




[illegible] SOME TALKING AROUND AND LEARNED MORE. BOB'S AUNT GAVE US MOST OF THE REAL STORY. SHE SAID THAT TANK HAD BEEN DATING [illegible] BLONDE BUNTED

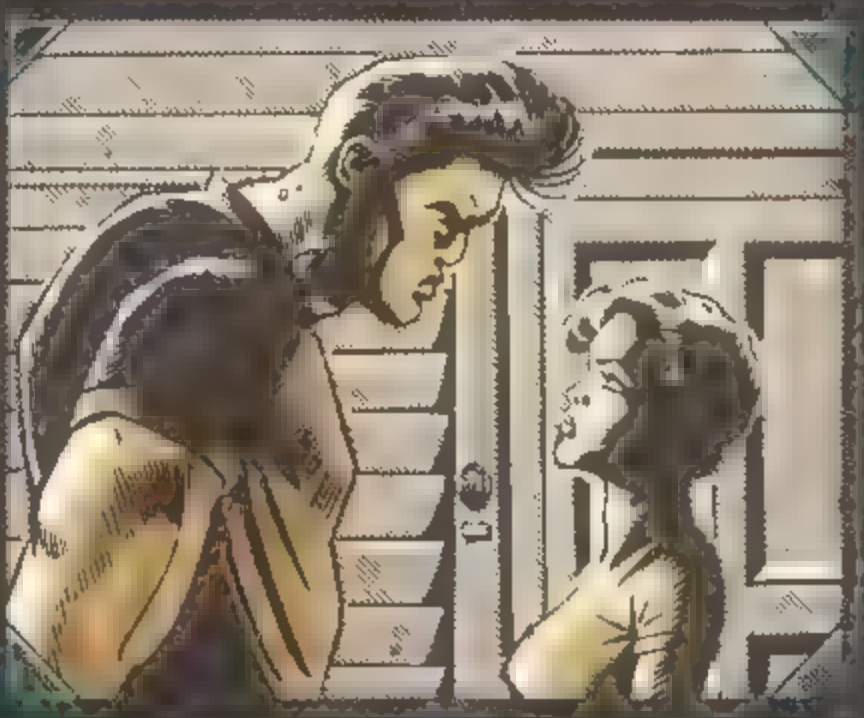
BOB, [illegible] GLASCO, SO TANK DID A LOT OF COMMUTING BETWEEN BELOIT AND GLASCO. MUCH AS WE DID, TANK HAD BEEN DATING BECKY FOR YEARS AND HE WAS WORKING UP TO A PROPOSAL THAT BECKY PROBABLY WOULD'VE REJECTED





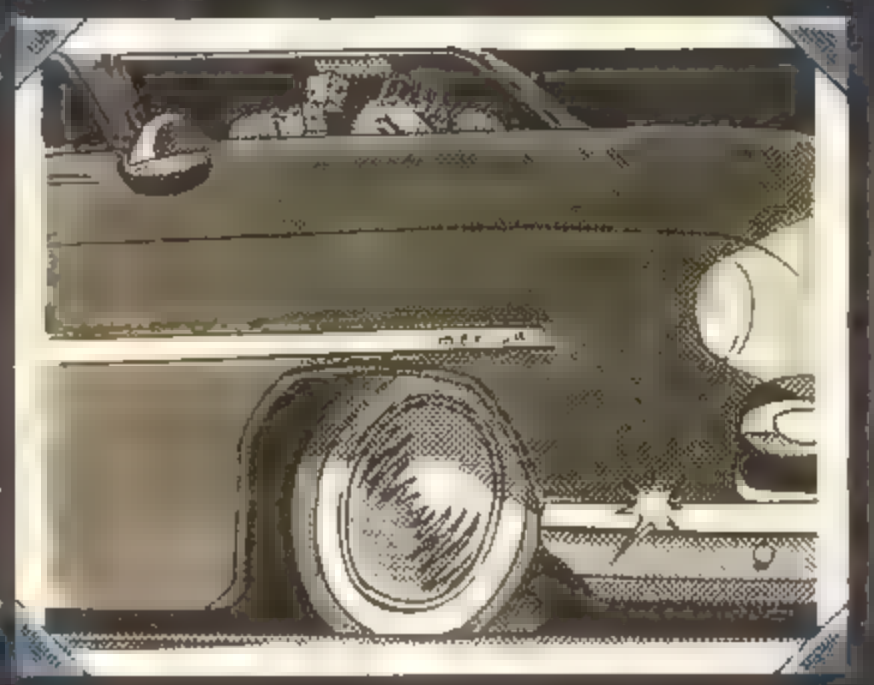
[illegible] LIKED TANK A LOT, BUT HE REALLY WANTED TO GO ON TO COLLEGE. WHEN A GIRL LEAVES GLASCO, SHE USUALLY MEETS A LOT OF NEW PEOPLE. MOST NEVER COME BACK, EXCEPT FOR VISITS. TANK WAS THE KIND OF GUY [illegible] IN BELOIT

A WAY [illegible] PROPOSE. HE WENT TO GLASCO THAT [illegible] TO SEE BECKY, BUT BOB'S [illegible] HE HAD PLANNED. SON OUT

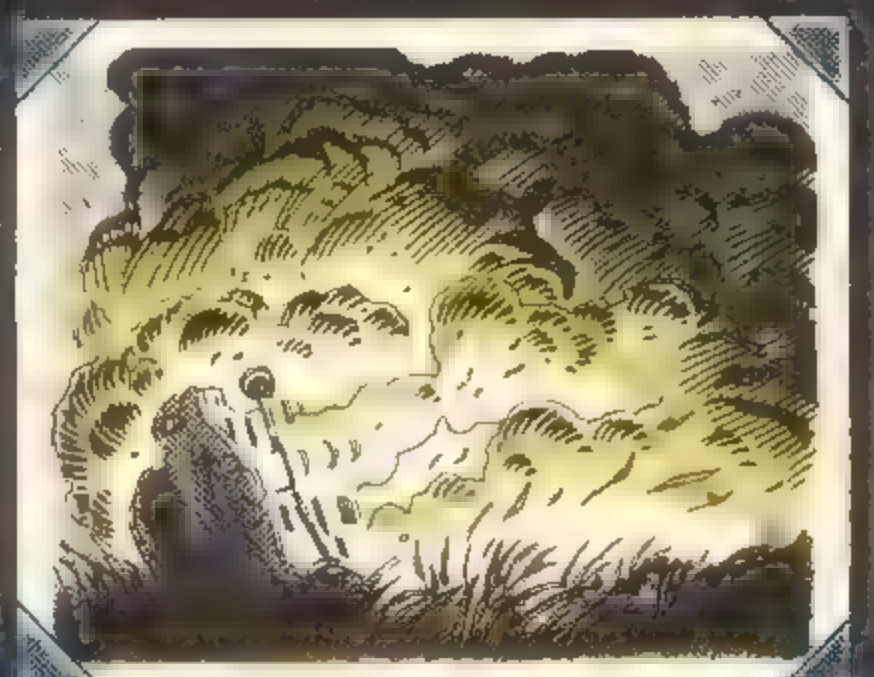


HOPPING MAD, TANK TORE OFF IN HIS MERC, HOPING PROBABLY TO OVERTAKE BECKY AND HER DATE. SINCE GLASCO DIDN'T HAVE A MOVIE HOUSE, HE FIGURED THEY'D HEAD FOR BELOIT.

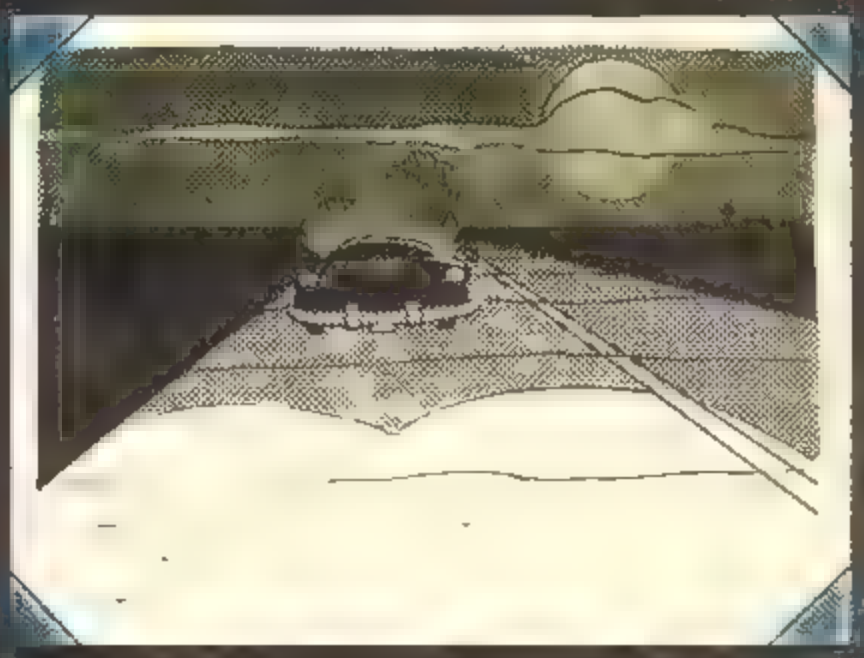
EVEN IN 1955, 41 WAS A VINTAGE STRIP OF ROAD THAT RAN NORTH-SOUTH FOR THIRTY MILES. PITCHES MADE FOR EXCELLENT PARKING.



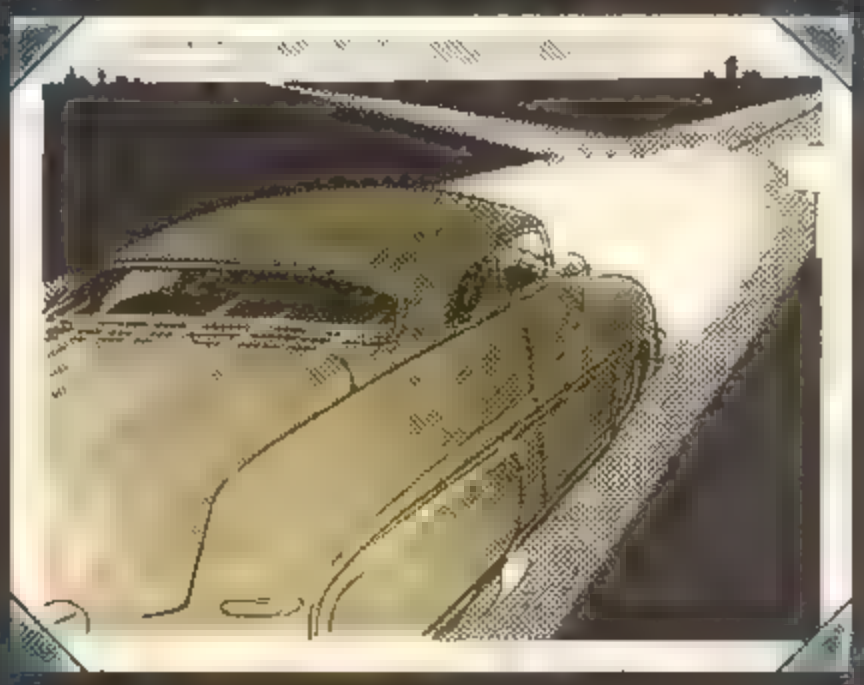
THE THOUGHT THAT MAYBE BECKY AND THE NEW GUY WERE PARKING ON OLD 41 GOT TO TANK SO HARD, HE DIDN'T KNOW WHICH WAY TO GO. SO HE ENDED UP GOING NOWHERE.



DRIVING HARD, TANK UNDOUBTEDLY WANTED TO GET TO BELOIT BEFORE THE SHOW LET OUT SO HE COULD CATCH BECKY AND THE NEW GUY BEFORE THEY GOT TO HIS CAR. BUT WHEN TANK GOT NEAR THE OLD 41 TURN-OFF, ANOTHER THOUGHT PROBABLY OCCURRED TO HIM.



A NARROW RIBBON OF OLD, CRACKED CONCRETE, WASN'T VERY WELL-TRAVELED BUT IT'S SHALLOW



IF YOU BELIEVE IN GHOSTS, IT'S NOT HARD TO IMAGINE TANK'S GHOST TEARING UP U.S. 24 LOOKING FOR BECKY. HE'D KEEP HIS BRIGHTS ON SO HE COULD PEER INSIDE CARS TO SEE IF BECKY WAS THERE. THEN HE'D COMPLETE THE TURN ONTO OLD 41. THAT'S A PRETTY STUPID NOTION.

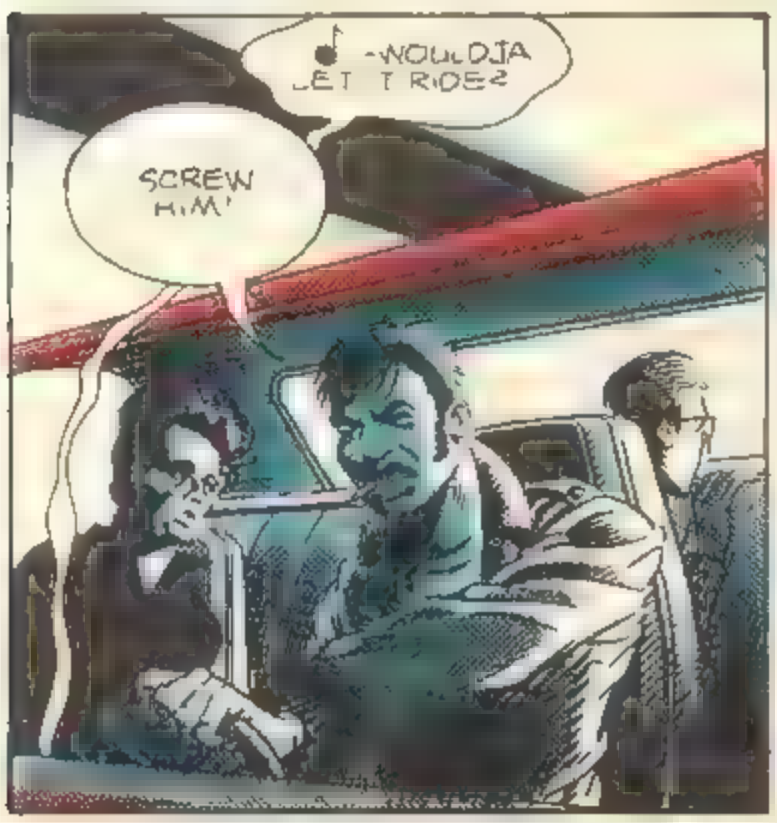
BECKY HUNTER COLLINS MOVED TO NEW YORK IN 1960 AND BOB'S AUNT ASSURED ME IT WASN'T FEAR OF HEADLIGHTS THAT MADE THE MOVE ATTRACTIVE TO HER. BUT IN 1975, THE OLD NEWSPAPER STORY WAS ALL BOB, DEAN, AND I KNEW ABOUT

THAT SATURDAY EVENING, THE THREE OF US CRUISED MILL STREET IN BOB'S DODGE BEFORE MAKING THE INEVITABLE TRIP TO GLASCO. WE HAD DATES, EXCEPT FOR DEAN, BUT THE PROSPECT OF ENCOUNTERING THE LIGHTS AGAIN WAS STRONGER THAN ANY DIM HOPE OF SEX...

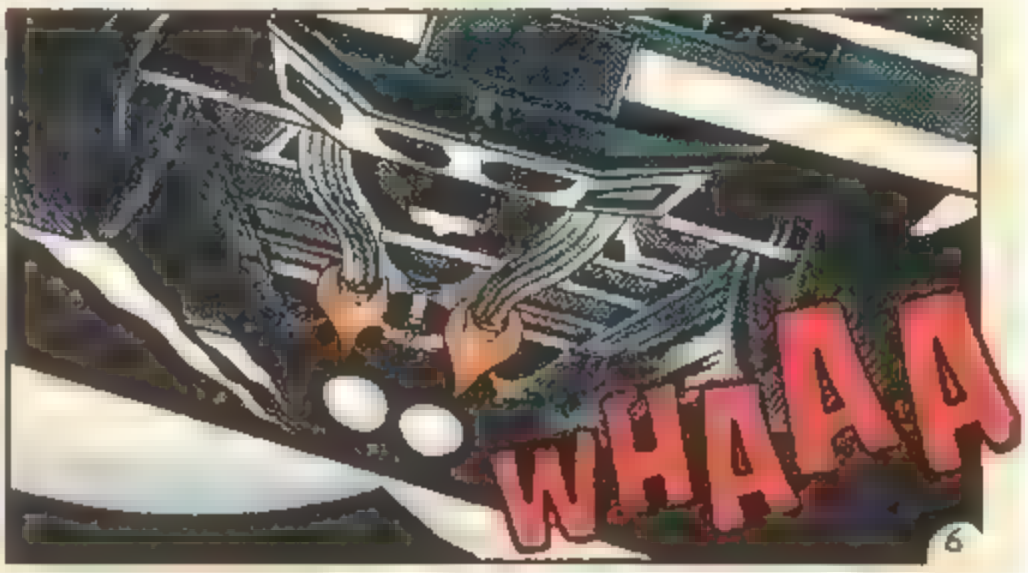
THE NIGHT WAS UNEVENTFUL. WE PARKED IN A CEMETERY, HOPING FOR SOME NECKING, BUT THE GIRLS WEREN'T COOPERATIVE. DISGUSTED, WE TOOK THEM HOME AND LEFT GLASCO. ON THE WAY BACK, I WAS IN MY CUSTOMARY PLACE IN THE BACK SEAT.

BACHMAN TURNER OVERDRIVE WAS SINGING AT US TO "STAY AWAKE ALL NIGHT" OVER THE EIGHT-TRACK. I GLANCED OUT THE BACK. THERE WERE HEADLIGHTS TO OUR REAR, COMING ON FAST...

BOB GROWLED STOMPING THE PEDAL.



THE CHALLENGER ROARED AND HIT 70.



THE HEADLIGHTS STAYED MUTELY ON OUR TAIL AT 85 MPH

C'MON BOB WHY BOTHER?

..T'S BEEN A SHIT-NIGHT AND I WANNA LOSE THIS GHOST!

--WOULD YOU SAY GOOD-BYE, WOULDJA LET .T R.DE-- ♪

THE CAR ROARED UP TO 100 MPH THE HEADLIGHTS D.DN'T WAVER. .T WAS HIGH-NOON BRIGHT INS.DE THE CHALLENGER.

WHAAAA

THE 41 TURN-OFF LOOMED AHEAD

WHAAAA

I'LL TAKE THE TURN AND HE'LL FOLLOW!

NO!

--R.DE--
--RIDE--
--R DE--
--LET .T RIDE--

DIRTY MILO-CANE CHURNED INTO THE CAR AS I BUFFETED FETALLY ON THE FLOOR...

WOMP! SHRIK!

I GRABBED AN ARM REST AND DROPPED TO THE FLOOR...

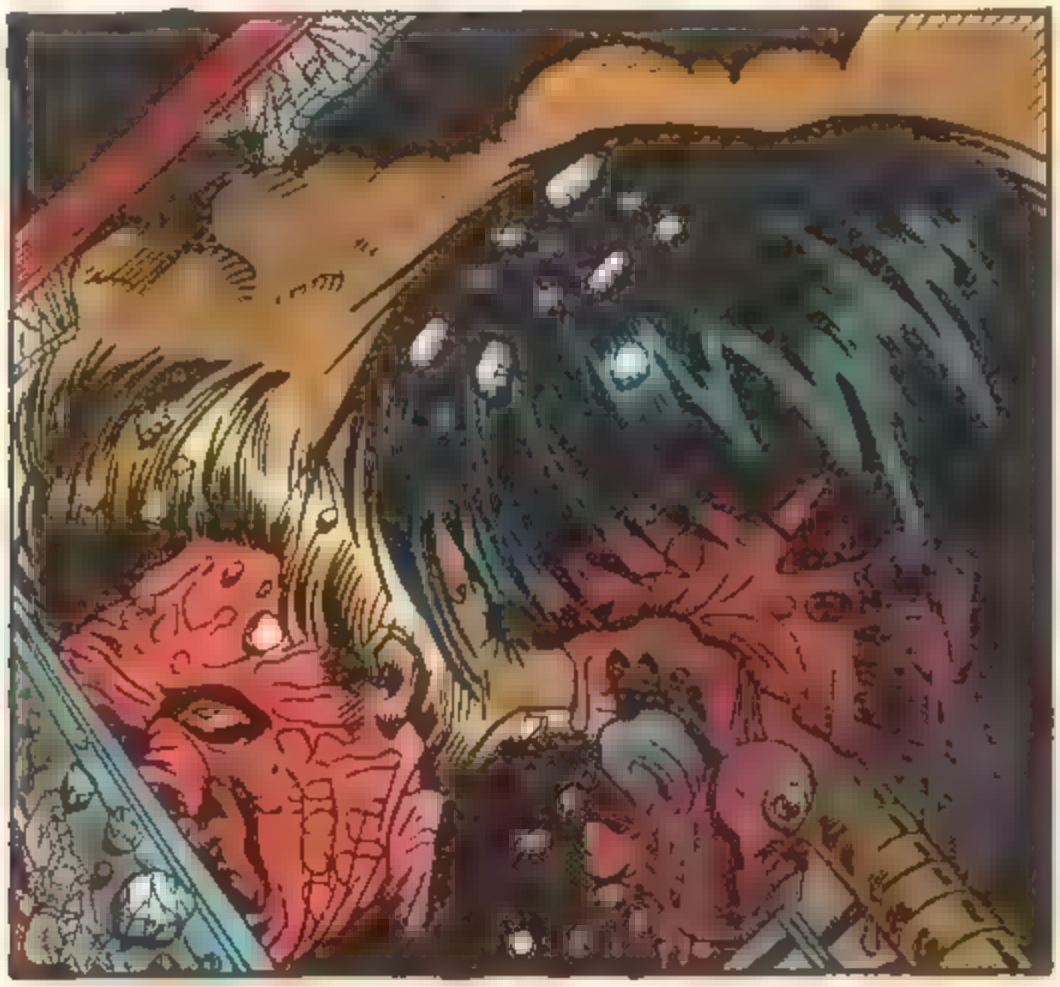
SCREECH!

WE SKIPPED OFF THE ROAD AND JUMPED THE DITCH AT 90. THE CHALLENGER BUCKED HARD INTO THE CULTIVATED EARTH AND THE TIRES BLEW OUT.

CRASH!

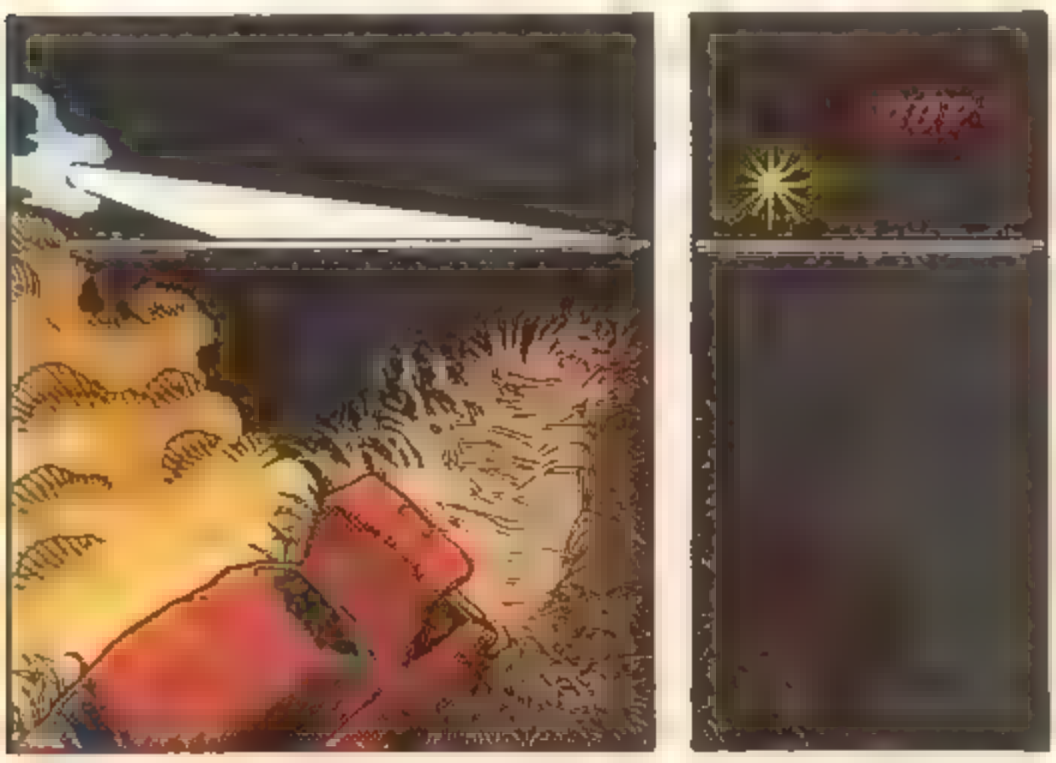
WE GROUND TO A DEAD HALT IN THE MILO FIELD...

OUR HEADLIGHTS FAINTLY LIT THE DEAD, BROWN STALKS AROUND US. THE TAPE HAD BROKEN AND FM HISS PLAYED SOFTLY IN THE CAR. IN THE FRONT SEAT, BOB AND DEAN REMAINED, THEIR HEADS IMBEDDED IN THE DASH..

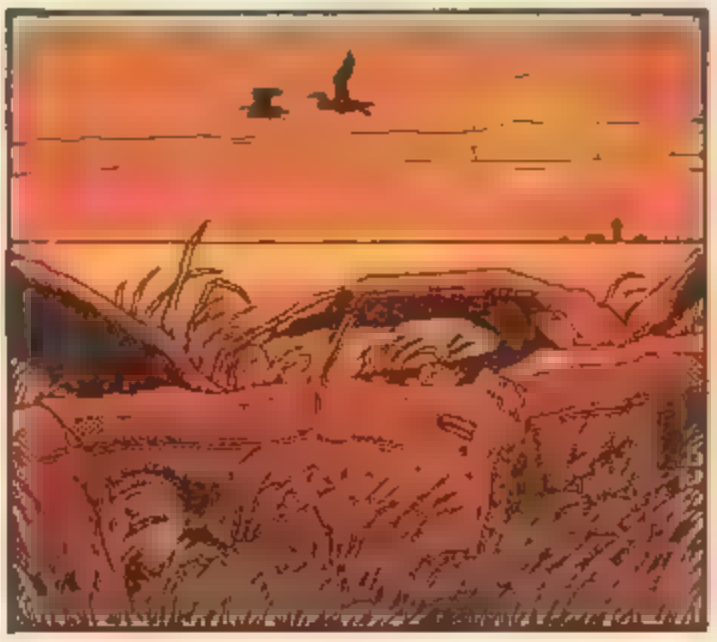


PAINFULLY, I TURNED AND LOOKED OUT, BACK THROUGH THE SWATH WE'D MADE. THE HEADLIGHTS HAD STOPPED, AS IF TO ALLOW THEIR INVISIBLE DRIVER TO VIEW THE ACCIDENT...

THEY STARTED MOVING SLOWLY FORWARD. I WATCHED THEM PASS BY, BUT THEY DIDN'T TURN ONTO OLD HIGHWAY 41. THEY JUST SWITCHED OFF..



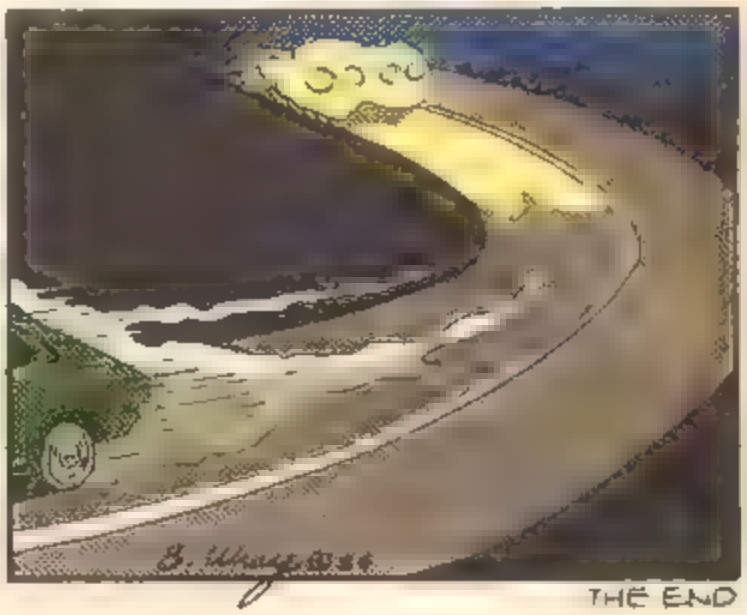
IT'S BEEN FOUR YEARS SINCE THE WRECK. IN A FEW WEEKS I'LL BE MOVING ON TO WICHITA TO START A NEW JOB. RECKON WHILE I'M HERE VISITING BELOIT I'LL STOP BY BOB'S AND DEAN'S GRAVES AND LEAVE THEM SOME FLOWERS...



LATELY, THE TALK AROUND TOWN IS THAT THE HEADLIGHTS THAT FOLLOW YOU FROM GLASCO ARE BACK. ONLY DIFFERENT. FOUR BEAMS NOW, INSTEAD OF TWO. LIKE THE HIGH BEAMS OF A DODGE...

COME TO THINK OF IT, I'D ***BETTER*** PUT FLOWERS ON MY FRIENDS' GRAVES..

LAST NIGHT, COMING INTO TOWN, THEY TRIED TO RUN ME OFF THE ROAD.



THE END

I HESITATED BEFORE WRITING THIS STORY IN FIRST PERSON I DIDN'T WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW HOW CRAZY I WAS AS A KID BUT THEN I FIGURED WHAT THE HELL? MY PROBLEM WAS A (PSYCHOTIC) INABILITY TO DISTINGUISH FACT FROM FANTASY I STILL REMEMBER THE DAY THE MARTIANS ATE THE PIECE OF APPLE PIE I WAS SUPPOSED TO SAVE FOR MY SISTER. LOOKING BACK, I DOUBT THE TRUTH OF THE TALE, BUT I RECALL IT AS FACT EVEN NOW.

ANYHOW THAT'S HOW I HAPPENED TO BE ON MY WAY TO MY UNCLE JERRY'S FARM OUTSIDE SCANDIA, KANSAS, TO SPEND THE SUMMER OF 1959 AWAY FROM THE "BIG CITY" OF WICHITA, MY FRIENDS, AND MY COMIC BOOKS, TO BREATHE IN THE WHOLESOME COUNTRY AIR AND LEARN HOW TO BECOME LIKE PINOCCHIO, A REAL BOY

AND BECAUSE AT SOME FUTURE TIME, I MAY SWEAR THE FOLLOWING TALE IS TRUE JUST REMEMBER THE MARTIANS WHO STOLE THE APPLE PIE AND TRY NOT TO TAKE TOO SERIOUSLY THE STORY I CALL...

SPADE, the WEREWOLF, and ME

STORY: JAN STRNAD ART VAL MAYERIK / Coloring Tom Luth Lettering Cody

HA-HA! THAT'S JUST *SPADE*, JAN! DON'T WORRY--HE'S A GOOD OLD DOG!

SORRY ABOUT THE NAME - HOPE NOBODY'S OFFENDED. I'M JUST TELLING IT LIKE IT WAS.

I DIDN'T HAVE MUCH IN COMMON WITH THE BOYS OF SCANDIA KANSAS AND SPADE QUICKLY BECAME MY BEST FRIEND. WE'D SPEND WHOLE DAYS TOGETHER EXPLORING THE FARM AND THE WOODS, GOOFING AROUND

I CREATED A FANTASY WORLD (AS USUAL) AND SPADE WENT ALONG WITH WHATEVER I COOKED UP. HE WAS A GOOD DOG, ALL RIGHT.

OKAY, K-9--THERE'S THE TYRANNOSAURUS REX. SOMEHOW WE'VE GOTTA GET PAST IT AND BACK TO THE *SHIP*...!

THE ONLY TIME WE WEREN'T TOGETHER WAS AT NIGHT. SPADE TOOK OFF EVERY EVENING, RIGHT AFTER DINNER.

GOES OFF TO *HOWL*, I GUESS BUT HE'S ALWAYS BACK FOR BREAKFAST...

ONE MORNING, UNCLE JERRY GOT A PHONE CALL FROM A FRIEND OF HIS, A FARMER NAMED "GINNIS." GINNIS'S GOAT HAD BEEN KILLED IN THE NIGHT AND GINNIS THOUGHT UNCLE JERRY SHOULD COME TAKE A LOOK.

GOOD LORD...TORN APART? SURE. I'LL BE RIGHT OVER.

WHAT D'YOU RECKON 'UD DO A THING LIKE THAT, JERRY? COYOTES?

NO COYOTE DID THIS. I'VE SEEN SOMETHING LIKE IT BEFORE, THOUGH. IN WYOMING.

IF THIS WAS SHEEP COUNTRY, I'D SAY THIS ANIMAL WAS KILLED BY A *WOLF*!

YOU'RE CRAZY! THERE AIN'T NO WOLVES IN *KANSAS*! MORE LIKELY IT'S THAT *DANE* OF YOURS--WHERE WAS *HE* LAST NIGHT?!

EVERYBODY KNOWS HOW HE RUNS LOOSE ALL NIGHT! WE'VE ALL SEEN HIM, JERRY. RUNNING THROUGH THE WOODS. HEARD HIM HOWLING AT THE MOON...!

COME ON, JAN. THERE'S NO TALKING TO GINNIS WHEN HE GETS LIKE THIS.

A MONTH WENT BY AND I DIDN'T THINK MUCH MORE ABOUT FARMER GINNIS AND HIS GOAT. I KNEW HE WAS FULL OF CRAP... SPADE WAS NO KILLER. HE WASN'T MUCH OF A POINTER EITHER, AS I LEARNED WHEN UNCLE JERRY TOOK ME OUT TO TEACH ME HOW TO SHOOT..

WE HADN'T FIRED A SHOT--SPADE CHASED MOST OF THE GAME AWAY BEFORE WE GOT TO IT--WHEN WE FOUND THE STAG. IT'D BEEN TORN APART, LIKE THE GOAT.

EVEN A WOLF COULDN'T HAVE DONE THIS. WHATEVER BROUGHT DOWN THIS STAG, IT WAS BIG. VERY BIG, AND VERY STRONG.

I KNEW WHAT HE WAS THINKING. SPADE WAS THE BIGGEST DOG WITHIN TWENTY MILES. IT'D TAKE SOMETHING AS BIG AS SPADE TO DO THIS KIND OF DAMAGE

I HAD TO DO SOMETHING. I HAD TO FIND THE WOLF.. OR WHATEVER IT WAS

THE NEXT NIGHT I SNEAKED OUT AFTER DINNER. SPADE FOUND ME AND JOINED THE HUNT. I DIDN'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I WAS AFTER BUT I FIGURED I'D RECOGNIZE IT WHEN I FOUND IT.

IT FOUND US. IT WAS HUGE - TWICE THE SIZE OF AN ORDINARY WOLF! AND ITS EYES GLOWED AT US IN THE MOONLIGHT, BURNING RIGHT INTO OUR SOULS!

FOR ABOUT A SECOND I WAS TOO SCARED TO SHOOT

IT WOULD HAVE KILLED ME IN THAT SECOND. BUT SPADE LEAPED UP AND CAUGHT IT IN MIDAIR! I FELL BACK AND FIRED!

I GUESS I HIT IT. BECAUSE IT RAN OFF. NOT TOO STEADY ON ITS FEET

C'MERE, SPADE! HERE, BOY!

LOOKS LIKE HE NIPPED YOU PRETTY GOOD. WE'D BETTER GET BACK SO I CAN CLEAN YOU UP

TOO BAD I MISSED HIM. BUT I'LL TELL UNCLE JERRY—HE'LL HUNT THE BASTARD DOWN!

BUT I DIDN'T TELL UNCLE JERRY, NOT WHEN I SAW THE HEADLINE IT ALL MADE SENSE, THEN THE GIANT WOLF WHERE NO WOLVES WERE SUPPOSED TO BE ...THE KILLINGS ON NIGHTS WITH FULL MOONS LOOKED LIKE MY HALF ASSED SHOT HAD BROUGHT HIM DOWN AFTER ALL.

SAYS HERE A COW WAS KILLED LAST NIGHT...TORN APART, PARTIALLY EATEN.

LOCAL NEWS FATAL GUNSHOT VICTIM FOUND

I COULDN'T TELL UNCLE JERRY--I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE GETTING CURED OF THAT KIND OF THINKING INSTEAD, I JUST NODDED MY HEAD, VERY AGREEABLE, WHEN HE SAID

I THINK WE'D BETTER FOLLOW SPADE ON HIS ROUNDS TONIGHT.

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT, AND I WAS GLAD TO BE OUT NIT I WAS SURE THE WEREWOLF WAS DEAD SPADE WAS FEELING HIS OATS ONLY UNCLE JERRY WAS SILENT AND TENSE

PRETTY SOON SPADE LEFT US BEHIND UNCLE JERRY STOPPED AND SCRATCHED HIS HEAD I KNEW SPADE WAS AROUND SOMEWHERE CLOSE HE NEVER WANDERED FAR WHEN I WAS WITH HIM.

THAT WAS WHEN WE HEARD A DEEP, ROLLING GROWL BEHIND US

IT WAS SPADE. I KNEW IT EVEN BEFORE I SAW THE WHITE PATCH ON HIS CHEST... IT WAS JUST SOMETHING I FELT. HE'D BEEN BITTEN BY THE WEREWOLF, AND UNDER THE FULL MOON, HE'D TRANSFORMED...

SPADE LUNGED AT US AND WE DROPPED BACK, UNCLE JERRY LOOSING ONE SHOT AS HE FELL

I HEARD UNCLE JERRY'S ARM SNAP AND KNEW OUR LIVES WERE IN MY HANDS I HAD TO SHOOT SPADE

SPADE PACED BACK AND FORTH IN FRONT OF US SEVERAL TIMES HE SEEMED ON THE VERGE OF ATTACKING, AND THEN HE'D WITHDRAW AND PACE SOME MORE

AND THEN HE BEGAN TO HOWL STILL PACING STILL AT WAR WITH HIMSELF, HE CRIED OUT IN CONFUSION AND DESPAIR

I TOOK AIM, AS TORN BY MY EMOTIONS AS SPADE MUST HAVE BEEN BY HIS I DIDN'T WANT TO KILL HIM, BUT HE COULDN T BE TRUSTED ANY-MORE HE D BECOME A MONSTER.

FOR GODSAKES, BOY, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? SHOOT!

I CAN'T! I CAN'T SHOOT SPADE!

DAMN CRAZY KID! STAND BACK!

SPADE'S MUSCLES TENSED AS UNCLE JERRY TRIED TO TAKE AIM. I HEARD THE RUMBLE DEEP IN SPADE'S THROAT, SAW HIS LIPS CURL BACK, SAW OUR LIVES HANGING BY A THREAD

HE DIDN'T WANT TO KILL US BUT HE HAD TO HE HAD TO HE WASN'T SPADE ANYMORE. HE WAS THE WEREWOLF.

I DID WHAT I HAD TO DO

GOODBYE, SPADE....

BLAM!

YESSIR. THE MIND'S A FUNNY THING. I DIDN'T WANT SPADE TO BE A KILLER ANY MORE THAN JAN DID. I *WANTED* IT TO BE A WOLF, SO THAT'S WHAT I SAW.

OF COURSE, WHEN WE RETRIEVED THE BODY, IT WAS JUST SPADE JAN HAD SHOT HIM CLEAN.

THE BOY'S TAKING IT HARD. I THINK. IT'S TIME TO SEND HIM HOME.

SPADE

MAYBE UNCLE JERRY WAS RIGHT. MAYBE THE WHOLE WEREWOLF BUSINESS WAS JUST IN MY HEAD, LIKE THE MARTIANS AND THE APPLE PIE. BUT EITHER WAY, MY SUMMER AT THE FARM CAME TO AN EARLY END. DAD TOSSED MY SUITCASES IN THE CAR AND WE LEFT.

I REMEMBER WORRYING ABOUT SPADE, WORRYING THAT HE HATED ME FOR KILLING HIM. BUT HE DIDN'T HATE ME. HE UNDERSTOOD. I KNEW HE UNDERSTOOD.

I KNOW BECAUSE HE FOLLOWED US CLEAR OUT OF TOWN, RUNNING BESIDE THE CAR WITH HIS LONG, SURE GAIT, AND HE DIDN'T LET US GO UNTIL WE REACHED THE HIGHWAY AND DAD PRESSED THE ACCELERATOR, AND HE COULDN'T KEEP UP ANYMORE...

DENNIS ETCHISON'S

WET SEASON

MADDEN WATCHED THE BLACK CROWD ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOVING GELATIN WALL, AS RAINWATER POURED DOWN IN TRANSLUCENT SHEETS OVER THE WINDSHIELD. HE DID NOT LISTEN TO THE PATTERNLESS TATTOO INSTEAD HE FOLLOWED WITH HIS EYES THE GROUP OF BLACK SHADOWS FLOATING PAST THE CAR.

I...I SHOULDN'T HAVE MADE YOU COME, LORIE

THAT'S ENOUGH, J.M. AFTER ALL, SHE WAS MY STEPDAUGHTER. I WOULDN'T HAVE FELT RIGHT OTHERWISE...

I ONLY WISH I COULD HAVE GOTTEN TO KNOW HER BETTER—THAT SHE MIGHT HAVE BECOME, IN TIME, MY LITTLE GIRL AS WELL...

IT WAS--JUST--ALL THE *MUD* AROUND HER--

IT'S BEEN AWFUL FOR YOU, DARLING, I KNOW. TRY NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT.

WE'D BETTER GO PICK UP THE TWINS. YOUR BROTHERS PROBABLY LOSING HIS MIND BY NOW.

HEY, YOU TWO. COME ON IN!

STORY: DENNIS ETCHISON ART: MIKE HOFFMAN

Coloring Joe Chiodo & Chris Miller Lettering. Carrie McCarthy

WE'RE SO SORRY TO DO THIS TO YOU, BART, BUT WE THOUGHT THE TWINS WERE REALLY TOO YOUNG TO, WELL, HAVE THEIR FACES RUBBED IN IT.

NO PROBLEM. THE KIDS ARE IN THE BEDROOM. THE RAIN MUST HAVE GOTTEN THEM DROWSY.

I'LL SEE TO THEM.

COME OVER HERE AND HAVE A DRINK, JIM.

NO BART. I...I DON'T NEED IT

YOU LOOK AT THE HOLE, AND THE MUD, AND YOU THINK OF...OF THAT HUMAN BEING THERE IN THE BOX, BEING LOWERED INTO THE MUD, AND YOU WONDER HOW IT CAN BE THAT THAT CHILD, A PIECE THAT HAS COME FROM YOU LIKE AN ARM OR A LEG, CAN BE CUT OFF, KILLED AND BURIED AWAY...

IT'S ALL RIGHT, JIM, I--

HEE-HEE-HEE!

HI, BOYS. HOW D IT GO?

WE HAD FUN, DA-DA. WE HAD SAMICHES

AN' WE TOOKA NAP AN WENT OLT AN PLAVED AN --

WENT OUT? BJT THE RAIN NEVER LET UP--

WELL, UH, THEY **BEGGED** TO GO OUT. FOR A FEW MINUTES S ALL. MADE 'EM REALLY HAPPY.

GOD KNOWS I HAVE NO PRACTICE IN CHILD-REARING. I HOPE THEY DIDN'T CATCH ANYTHING.

TAD AND RAY NEVER CATCH COLDS. YOU DID FINE, BART.

WE'D BETTER GO. IT'S SUNDAY AND I HAVE A WOMEN'S GUILD MEETING TONIGHT, COME, BOYS..

THANKS BART, I MEAN IT MORE THAN I CAN SAY.

YOU KNOW I KNOW. I CAN'T SAY IT, BUT I REMEMBER THE SUNDAY WE BURIED MAMA--

COME ON. J.M.!

HEE-HEE-HEE!

--YOUR SOUP S N THE OVEN, KEEP NG WARM, AND THE TW NS ARE TUCKED N, SO DON T--I MEAN, THEY SHOULDN'T GIVE YOU ANY TROUBLE...

LORELE' DO YOU EVER.. REGRET MARRY NG ME? I MEAN, IT S BEEN TEN MONTHS NOW AND--

DAR NG! YOU RE THE F NEST FATHER MY BOYS COULD POSS BLY HAVE!

DO YOU NEED TO TALK TO JIM? THE GU LD MEETING--

NO . NO. THEY'RE WA TING FOR YOU ALREADY.. THERE ISN'T ANYTHING YOU CAN DO FOR ME...

ALL R GHT, THEN I LL BE HOME BEFORE YOU KNOW IT.

HE..O?...

UH, BART, I... I JUST WONDERED IF... AW, NEVER M ND, I SHOULDN T HAVE BOTHERED YOU...

T S ALL R GHT, K D I UNDERSTAND. I LL BE R GHT OVER. *CLICK*

--BUT THEN THEY THREW THE NEXT GAME TO THE MOTHERIN' ANGELS!

AW, JIMBO, GOD, DAMN IT!

WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?

I-I DON'T WANNA SAY IT. I DON'T EVEN KNOW I'M RIGHT, OR IF I *OUGHT* TO SAY IT!

I-I CAN TALK ABOUT DARLA NOW. PROBABLY IT WOULD DO ME GOOD. I KNOW I HAVE TO FACE--

THAT'S *NOT* WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT. *LISTEN* TO ME, KID. DO YOU *FEEL* IT?

FEEL— *WHAT?*

SOMETHING! ABOUT THIS *HOUSE*, THE *WAY* IT SMELLS NOW THE WAY THE CHAIRS CREAK WHEN I SIT DOWN. THE COLOR OF THE *LIGHT*, FOR GOD'S SAKE, LIKE THE ROOM IS *UNDER WATER* OR SOMETHING! ALL SINCE LORELEI MOVED IN...

HAVEN'T YOU NOTICED ANYTHING, WELL, *DIFFERENT* ABOUT THE PLACE SINCE LORI AND HER KIDS MOVED IN? LIKE IT ISN'T REALLY *YOURS* ANYMORE?

LOOK, EVERYONE HAS TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS WHEN THEY MARRY--

THAT'S NOT WHAT I *MEAN!* EVERY PERSON HAS A RHYTHM, A PATTERN TO HIS EVERYDAY LIFE. YOU CAN GO INTO A MAN'S BEDROOM, IT *SMELLS* LIKE HIM, THE BED BENDS A CERTAIN WAY WHEN YOU SIT ON IT, BECAUSE IT'S BEEN SHAPED TO FIT EVERY ANGLE AND BULGE JUST RIGHT OVER THE YEARS--

--IT'S LIKE A HOUSE SOAKS UP WHAT A MAN IS THE WAY HE FEELS ABOUT LIFE; AND THE WOMAN HE MARRIES SHE SEEMS TO FIT RIGHT IN, FIT *HIM* AND THE HOUSE...OR DOESN'T FIT *IN*, SHE'S *NOT YOU*, YOU KNOW? HAVEN'T YOU NOTICED SOMETHING ...*UNUSUAL* ABOUT LORI?

SHE'S AN UNUSUALLY ATTRACTIVE WOMAN, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU MEAN.

HELL, IT'S NOT JUST HER IT'S THE *WHOLE TOWN!* JIM, DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY STORMS LIKE THIS WE'VE HAD IN THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS?

I'LL TELL YOU: THREE. BUT IN THE LAST TWO YEARS, FIVE BIG ONES. AND THE RIVER'S FLOODED IT'S BANKS FOUR TIMES!

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU GETTING AT, BART?

I SPENT ALL DAY YESTERDAY AT THE LIBRARY. LOOK AT *THIS*. DEATH BY DROWNING COUNTY BEACH: THIS YEAR. AND LAST, TOTAL 31. PREVIOUS TWO YEARS TOTAL, 9.!

LET ME SEE...

'TOTAL RAINFALL N INCHES UP 300% IN *TWO YEARS*'. AND HERE'S A LIST OF NEW RESIDENTS IN GREENWORTH IN THE PAST TWENTY-FOUR MONTHS--LORIE NEVER TOLD YOU WHERE SHE CAME FROM, DID SHE?

WE... NO BUT WHAT--?

THERE ARE TWO DOZEN NEW RESIDENTIAL LISTINGS FOR THE PAST TWENTY-FOUR MONTHS INCLUDING LORIE AND THE TWINS. LAST NIGHT I GOT OUT A PHONE BOOK AND DIALED EACH NEW LISTING..

TWENTY-ONE ARE MARRIED COUPLES. AND EVERY WOMAN--EVERY WOMAN IS IN THE WOMAN'S GUILD.

SO?

LOOK AT THIS ONE. IT WAS IN GAZETTE.

GREENWORTH GAZETTE APRIL 7 95

ANOTHER NEW RESIDENT--LOOK FAMILIAR?

I DON'T SEE--

HERE.

...T-THEY COULD BE SISTERS...

JIM, I CALLED THE COMMUNITY CENTER THIS EVENING. THEY *NEVER HEARD* OF THE *WOMAN'S GUILD!*

AND NOW, JUST ONE MORE QUESTION: HOW DID YOUR LITTLE GIRL DIE?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE *DRIVING AT! PLEASE--*

JUST *SAY* IT.

S-SHE--SHE *DROWNED* IN THE BOTTOM-- OF-- THE *TUB!* (SOB!)

WHY JAMES, I THOUGHT YOU'D BE IN BED--

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

YOUR CLOTHES. THEY'RE SOAKED.

IT'S RAINING OUT...

ALL YOU DID WAS RUN FROM THE CAR. IT'S NOT RAINING *THAT* HARD.

WHY, JAMES--

GET AWAY. WHO *ARE* YOU?

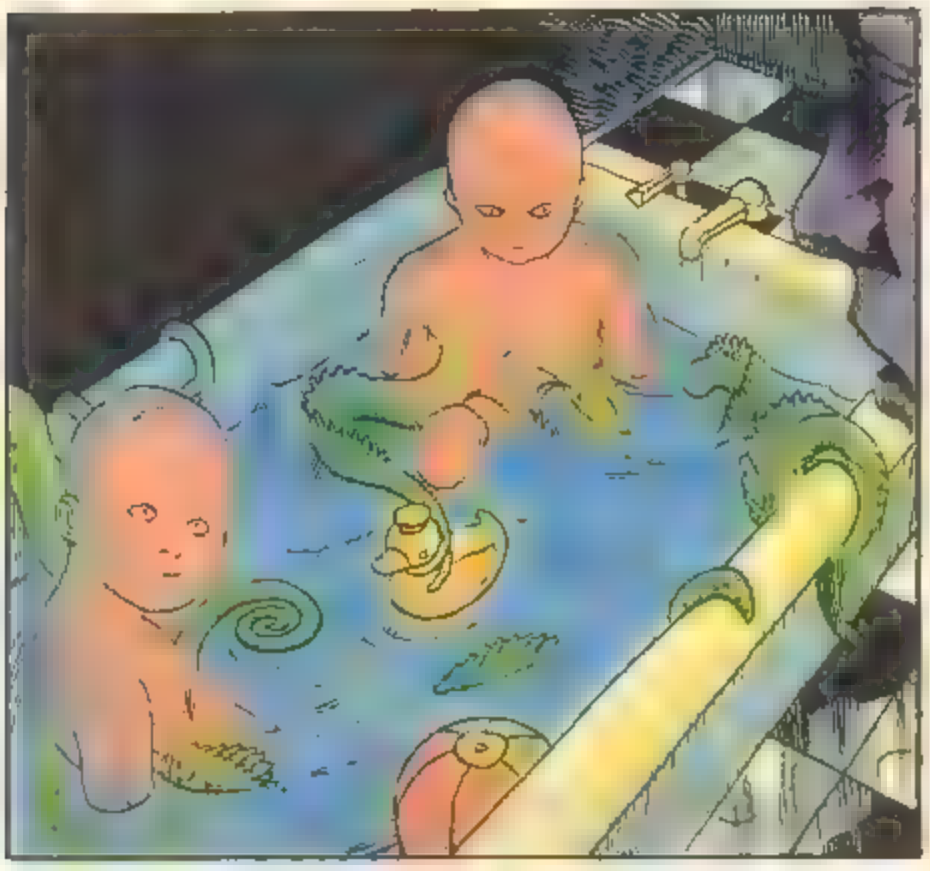
WHY ARE *THEY* UP AT THIS HOUR?

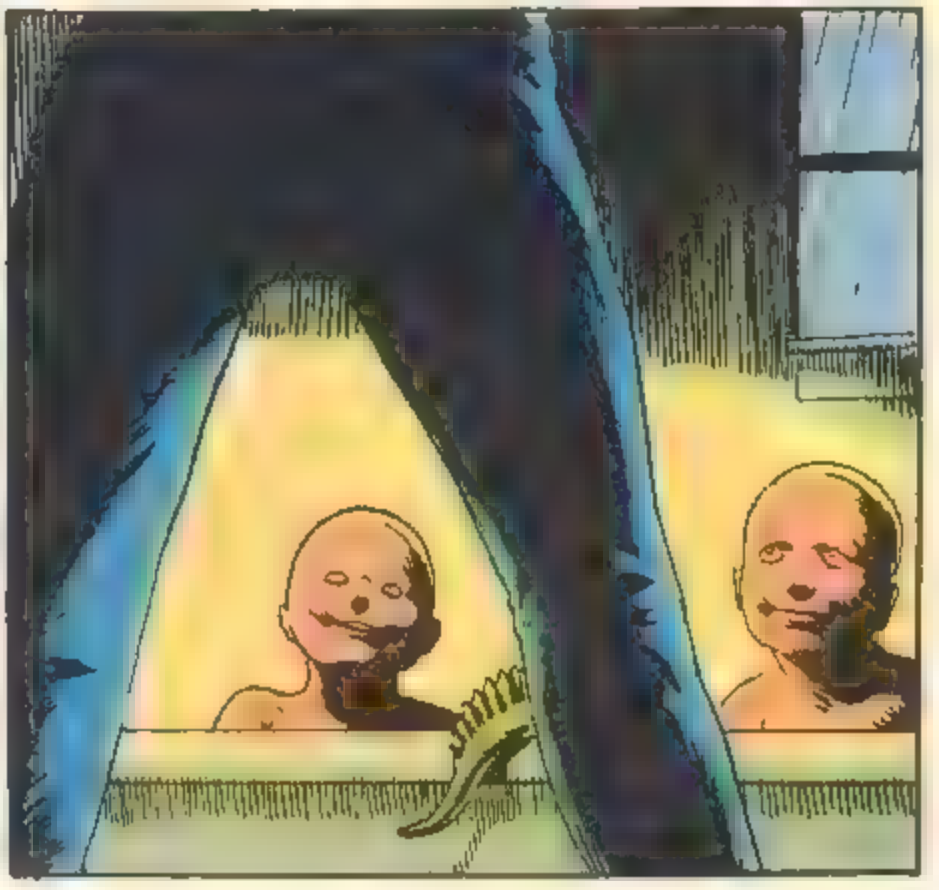
JAMES!

HEE HEE HEE

CRASH!

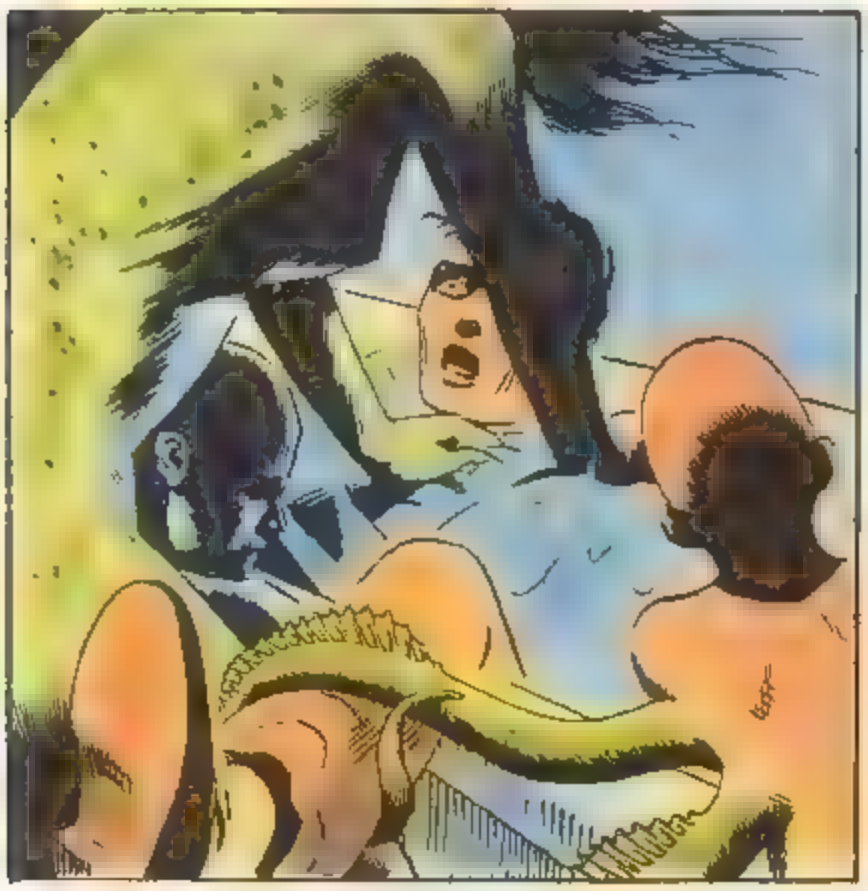
HEE-HEE HEE
WHAT IS THIS? WHY ARE YOU BOYS BATHING AT THIS TIME OF NI--
OH MY GOD!

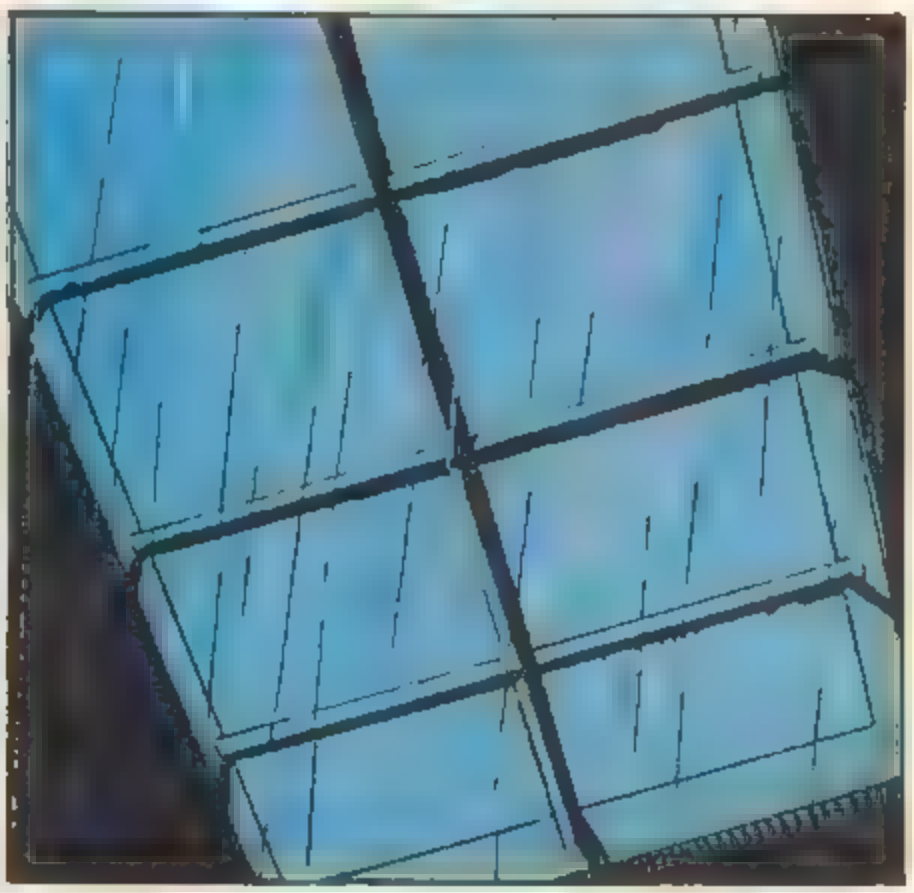




SO NOW YOU KNOW...

HEE-HEE-HEE





BEER

I WAS NEW IN THE LITTLE CANADIAN VILLAGE AND ANXIOUS TO MAKE FRIENDS, GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE LOCALS.

TRAPPING CAN BE A GOOD LIFE... BUT A *LONELY* ONE...

NAME'S ***JOSH BENSON,*** NEW IN THESE PARTS. BUY YOU A DRINK, FRIEND?

'PRECIATE IT. NAME'S ***RUTLEDGE.*** YOU'LL FORGIVE ME FER NOT ***SHAKIN'***... LOST BOTH MUH HANDS HERE EIGHT YEARS BACK.

GEE... THAT'S ROUGH. ACCIDENT?

MIGHT SAY THAT. THINGS WUZ A LOT ***ROWDIER*** ROUND HERE IN THEM DAYS. THE LOCAL BOYS WUZ A PRETTY TOUGH LOT...COULD BE HARD ON A ***GREENHORN*** FROM THE STICKS LIKE I WUZ...

"I'D BOUGHT ME A SHINY NEW ***SNOWMOBILE*** JUST LIKE YERZ-- FIGURED I'D CUT MY TRAPPIN TIME BY HALF. WELL, THE LOCALS GOT TO ***RIBBIN*** ME ABOUT IT... SAID IFN I WUZ SO HOT--"

--LET'S SE YA RUN UP TO MILLER'S PEAK N BACK ON THET THING.

"I ACCEPTED THE CHALLENGE--I WUZ NEW AND NOBODY'D TOLD ME NUTH'N BOUT MILLER'S PEAK. SO'S I PUT IN A FRESH TANK FULL AND HEADED OFF AS THE LOCALS ***HOOTED*** AND ***HOLLOWERD*** BEHIND ME..."

"WELL, IT WUZ NO BIG THING GETTIN TO THE TOP, 'N I STILL HAD PLENTY OF PETROL TO GET BACK DOWN AGAIN....T WASN'T TIL I LOOKED AT THE *NORTH SKY* THAT I FOUND OUT WHAT EVERYBODY ELSE ALREADY *KNEW*."

...JESUS...

"THE STORM HIT *FAST* AND *HARD*.. I CAN STILL REMEMBER THAT FEELIN OF *ICY DREAD* SLIDING THROUGH MY VEINS AS I TRIED TO BEAT IT BACK DOWN THAT *MOUNTAIN*..."

"IN NO TYME AT ALL, YA COULDN'T SEE A HAND AFORE YER FACE..."

KA-RAAWNGGG!

"I CRAWLED OVER TO THE MACHINE BUT EVEN THOUGH THE RUNNERS WUZ STILL GOOD, I COULD SEE THE ENGINE WUZ GONE. I JUST LAY BACK AND WAITED FOR DEATH TO COME.."

"I WUZ OUT AT LEAST FOUR HOURS, MAYBE *MORE*...WHEN I F.NALLY COME TO, I KNEW MY HANDS WERE FROSTBIT NEAR CLEAN THROUGH..."

KERUNCHH!

"I KEPT DRIFTING IN AND OUT OF CONSCIOUSNESS. THEN, I OPENED MY EYES ONCE TO SEE A TALL, DARK SHAPE LOOMING OVER ME. I COULDN'T SEE THE *FACE*...BUT THE VOICE WAS LIKE GRAVEL OVER SANDPAPER..."

WHAT HAVE YOU IN *TRADE?*

IT TOOK ME A MINUTE TO FIGURE OUT WHAT HE WAS *GETTIN* AT...THEN, I REALIZED HE WAS *BARTERIN* TO SAVE MY LIFE!..."

WHAT HAVE YOU IN *TRADE?*

...F-FIFTY BUCKS IN M-MY BACK POCKET...

HE LAUGHED AT THAT...A LOW GUTTERAL, *MIRTHLESS* LAUGH..."

WHAT HAVE YOU IN *TRADE?*

"I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY, SO I JUST LAY THERE STARIN INTO THEM HOT, BURNIN CAR-BUNCLES THAT WUZ HIS EYES..."

"HE KNELT DOWN THEN AND LIFTED THE FROZEN *STUMPS* THAT WUZ MY HANDS...HE MADE A STRANGE *SOUND* IN HIS THROAT..."

"THEN HE GOT UP AND BEGAN TEARIN OFF HIS *CLOTHES*..AN RIPPIN THE PIECES INTO LONG STRIPS...

"NEXT THIN I KNOWED, HE'D STUFFED ME BACK IN THE VEHICLE, WRAPPED ME UP GOOD AND WARM AND FASTENED THEM STRIPS OF CLOTH *ABOUT* HIM LIKE A *HARNESS*..."

THEN BEGAN THE *WEIRDEST* RIDE OF MY LIFE..."

"HOW HE MANAGED TO *PULL* THAT MUCH WEIGHT LET ALONE *RUN* WITH IT, I'LL NEVER KNOW... BUT RUN HE DID, SO FAST THE WIND CUT INTO MY FACE LIKE A KNIFE...'

"IT STARTED IN SNOWIN AGAIN AND THE *HARDER* IT FELL THE *FASTER* WE WENT./ AT TIMES I COULD HARDLY SEE THE BOBBING FIGURE AHEAD BUT I'D *SWEAR* IT HAD *CHANGED* SOMEHOW..."

"THEN, ABOVE THE SHRIEKING OF THE WIND, CAME A SOUND I'LL TAKE WITH ME TO THE GRAVE... A *HOWLIN* NOISE, LIKE THAT OF SOME IMPOSSIBLY LARGE ANIMAL...

"I MUST HAVE PASSED OUT. WHEN I NEXT WOKE, I WUZ IN MY *CABIN*, THERE WUZ A BRIGHT FIRE GOIN AND I WUZ COVERED WITH A BLANKET...*AND BOTH MY HANDS WUZ MISSIN!*"

"DOC FORESTER SAID I WUZ A PERFECT *AMPUTATION-CAUTERIZIN* JOB, 'CEPT FOR ON THING...THE BONE DIDN'T LOOK SLICED OFF. IT LOOKED *CHEWED* OFF!..."

GOD! THAT'S AN *AMAZING* STORY! AND ALL BECAUSE A BUNCH OF ROWDY *LOCAL BOYS* WERE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF A NEWCOMER! JESUS! CAN I BUY YOU ANOTHER *DRINK*, MISTER?

I'LL GET THIS ONE...

...ANOTHER BEER, MIKE!

AND DRAW ONE FOR MY *GREENHORN* FRIEND HERE TOO!

ONE FOR THE MONEY...

YOUR NAME IS PETER FRANKS. YOU ARE A THIEF. FOR WEEKS NOW YOU HAVE SCHEMED TO ROB THE PALATIAL VAN PELT ESTATE DURING THE HEIGHT OF ITS ANNUAL COSTUME PARTY

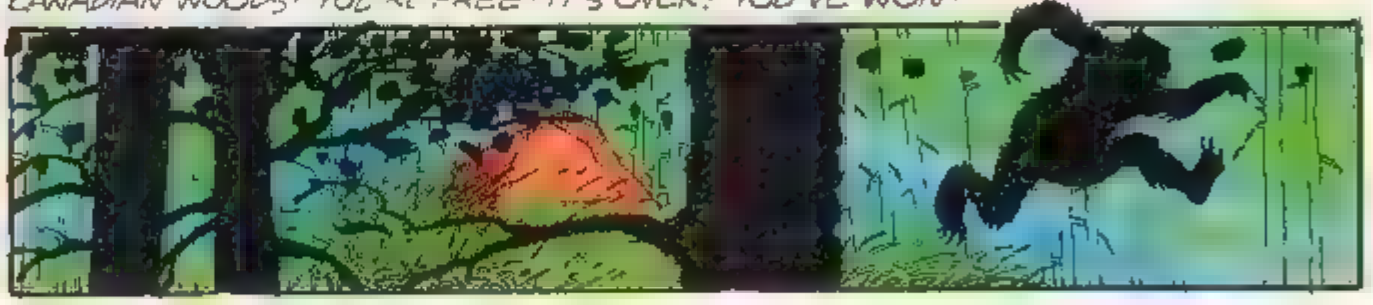
BUT YOUR PLANS ARE CUT SHORT BY THE UNEXPECTED ENTRY OF ONE OF THE GUESTS.

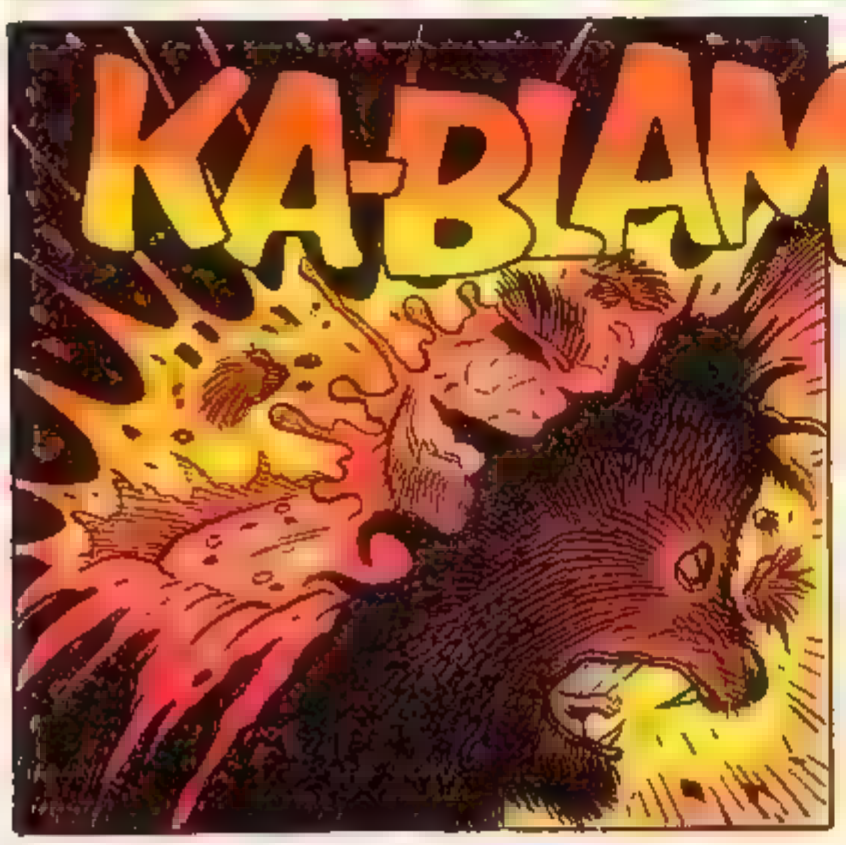
YOU STRUGGLE WITH THE MAN IN THE BEAR COSTUME AND SOON HE LIES DEAD AT YOUR FEET. YOU TURN TO FLEE, BUT NOW YOUR ESCAPE ROUTE IS FILLED WITH PARTY GUESTS

ONLY ONE THING TO DO...QUICKLY YOU STRIP THE COSTUME FROM THE DEAD MAN AND TUG IT ON OVER YOUR OWN CLOTHING

PERSPIRING PROFUSELY BENEATH THE HEAVY COSTUME, YOU NONETHELESS WALK UNDETECTED PAST THE OBLIVIOUS PARTY GOERS .

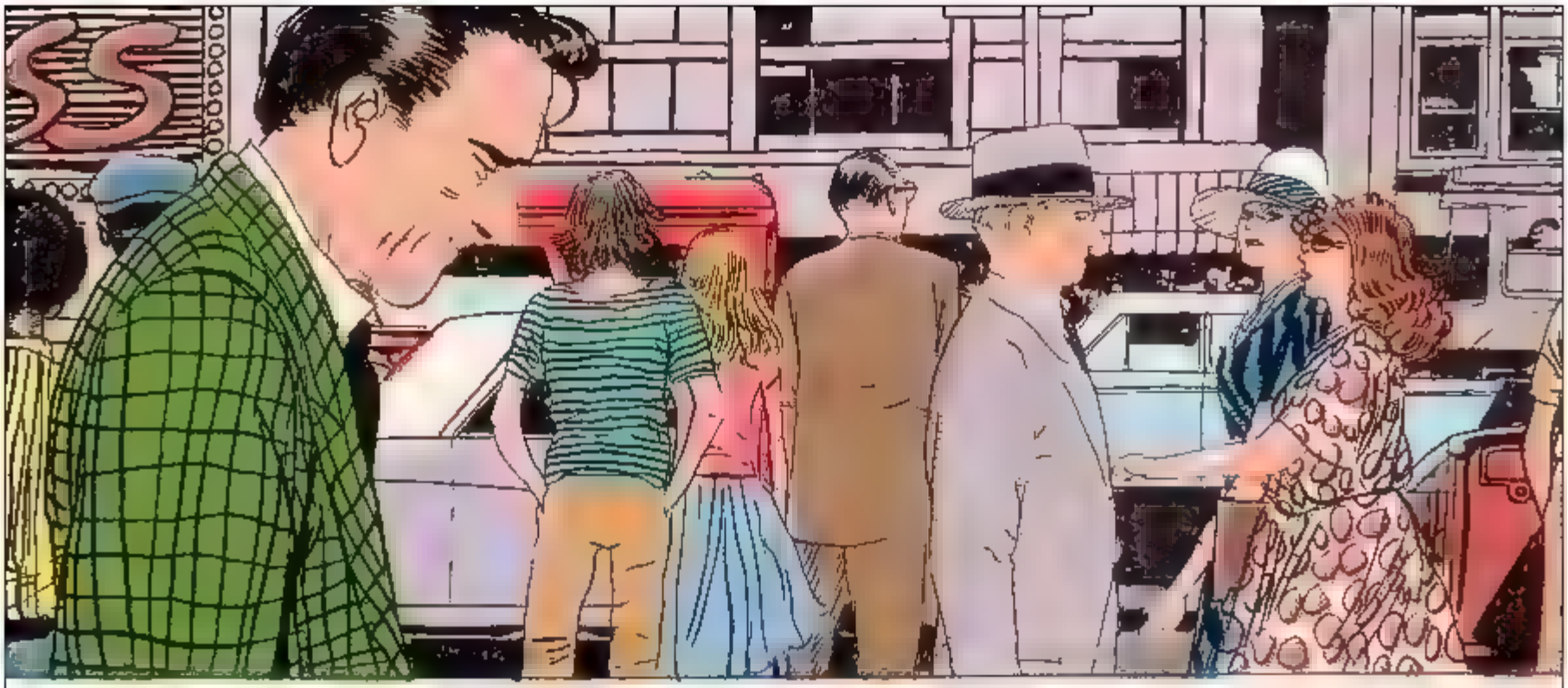
AT LAST YOU ARE CLEAR OF THE ESTATE AND RUNNING HEADLONG INTO THE DEEP CANADIAN WOODS! YOU'RE FREE! IT'S OVER! YOU'VE WON!

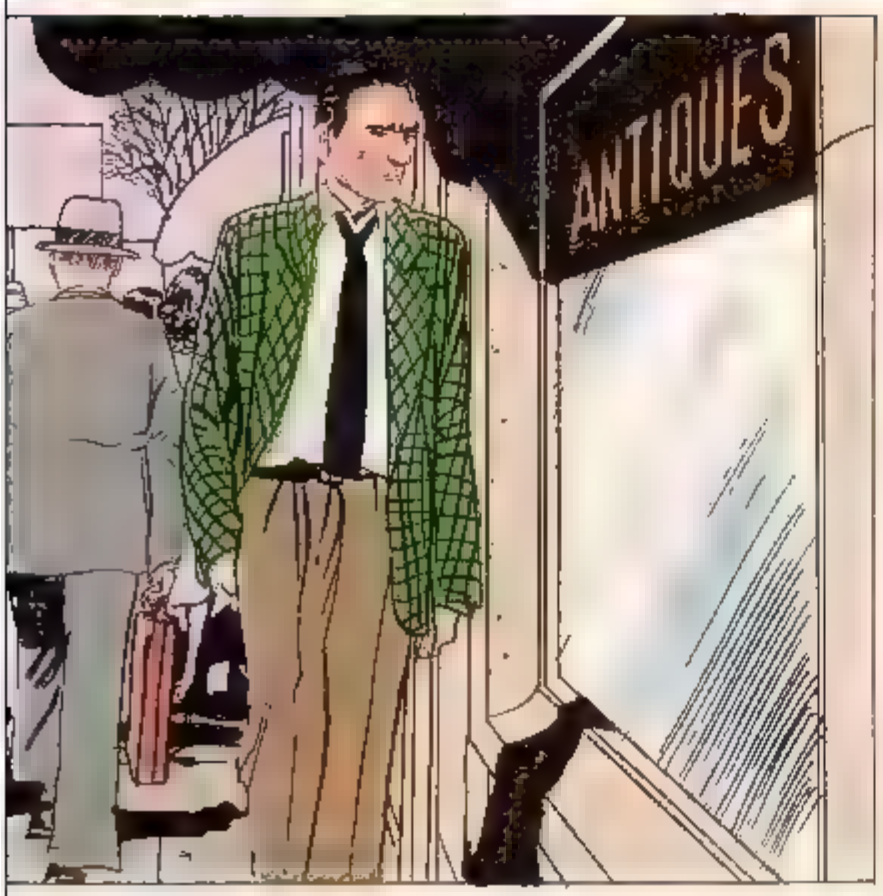




..AND AS THE PLAID-JACKETED HUNTERS CLOSE IN ABOUT YOU AND YOUR LIFE'S BLOOD SOAKS THROUGH THE TATTERED PARTY COSTUME, YOU REALIZE, PETER FRANKS.

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: BILL WRAY COLORS: CHRIS MILLER

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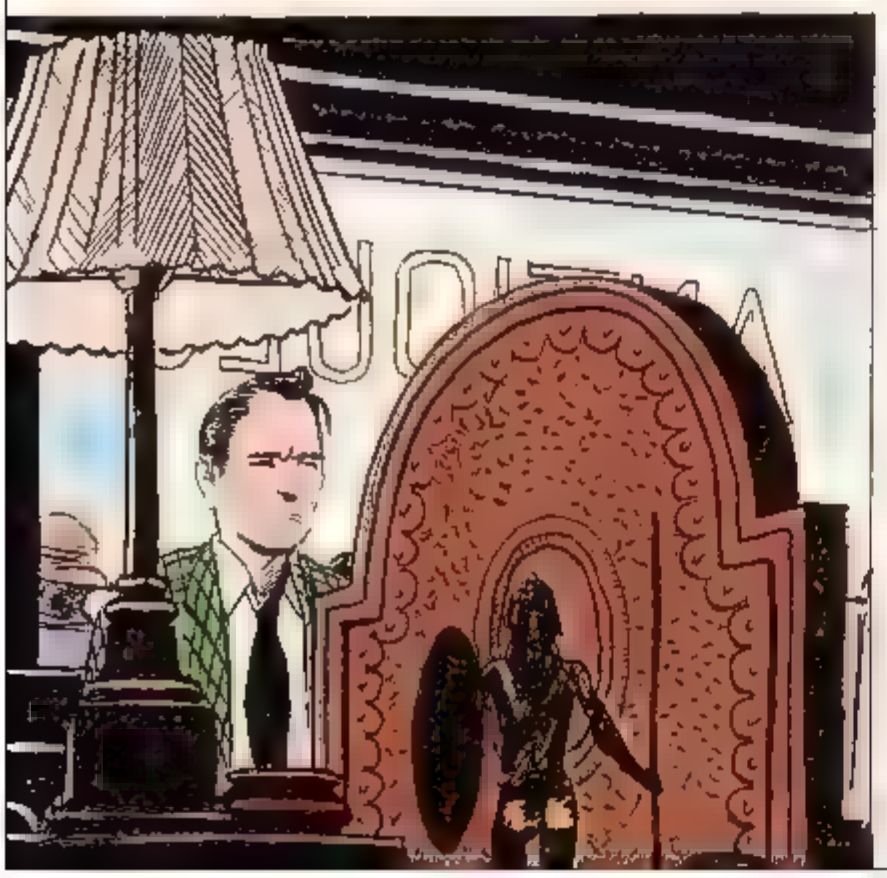
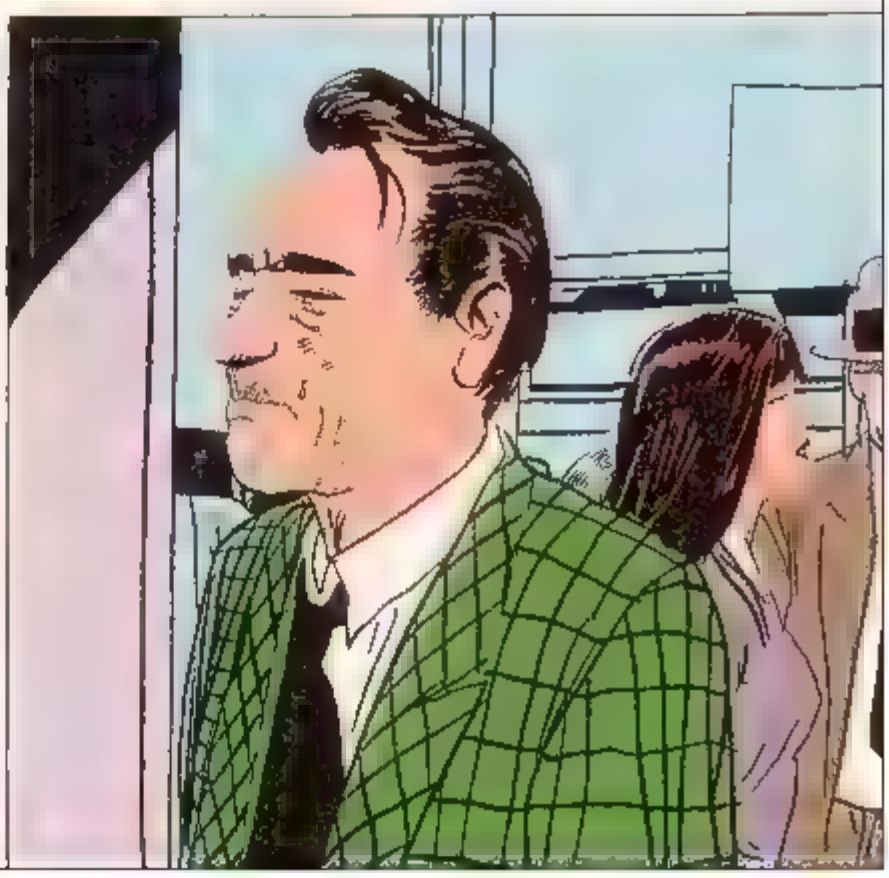




FIFTEEN HUNDRED DOLLARS FOR A BED?

IT'S VICTORIAN SIR AT LEAST A HUNDRED YEARS OLD

WHO WAS THE FORMER OWNER?

SAINT AMELIA'S

SAINT AMELIA'S?

THE OLD ORPHANAGE OVER ON SIXTH AND CLEVDON THEY TORE IT DOWN LAST YEAR.

THIS BED WAS FOUND IN A LOCKED ROOM IN THE BASEMENT

WELL, SIR? DO YOU WANT THE BED OR NOT? SIR?

I HAD THE DELIVERY MEN PUT IT IN THE READING ROOM RIDICULOUS WASTE OF MONEY, I DON'T COLLECT ANTIQUES. I NEVER HAVE GUESTS IN NEED OF A SPARE BED.

I'VE BOUGHT A FIFTEEN HUNDRED DOLLAR DUST COLLECTOR ....

WHAT COULD HAVE POSSESSED ME TO DO SUCH A STUPID THING?

MUST BE LOSING MY MIND...

DON'T HAVE NIGHTMARES. DON'T DREAM AT ALL...

MY NIGHTS ARE LIKE MY DAYS... NOTHINGNESS. AN AIMLESS BLACK...

CLICK

12:00

IN A WAY, I AM SHARING KATHY'S WORLD.

5:00

PLEASE HELP ME, MISTER.

I WOKE UP, AND TOBY WAS GONE. I LOOKED EVERYWHERE BUT I CAN'T FIND HIM.

PLEASE HELP ME FIND TOBY, MISTER! I CAN'T GO BACK TO SLEEP WITHOUT HIM!

HER HAND WAS COLD AS ICE .. COLDER THAN DEATH ITSELF....

I'M SORRY, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE TOBY IS.

THEN I WANT TO GO BACK TO BED. WILL YOU SHOW ME THE WAY?

I LED HER TROUGH THE HALLS OF THE DARK HOUSE.... TO THE PLACES I SOMEHOW KNEW SHE BELONGED....

WON'T BE ABLE TO SLEEP WITHOUT TOBY.

DON'T WORRY.. I'LL TRY TO FIND HIM FOR YOU

THANK YOU, MISTER

MY NAME S PAUL. WHAT'S YOURS?

SARAH. SARAH BRANNIGAN.

WILL YOU KISS ME GOODNIGHT, MISTER PAUL?

HER CHEEK WAS COLD....COLD AS ICE..

YOU'LL TRY TO FIND TOBY? PROMISE?

I PROMISE. GOODNIGHT, SARAH.

WHEN I REACHED THE DOORWAY.. STOPPED. I KNEW I SHOULDN'T LOOK BACK ...

..BUT I DID...

IT WAS EMPTY OF COURSE...

THE SALESMAN AT THE ANTIQUE STORE COULDN'T ADD MUCH TO WHAT HE'D ALREADY TOLD ME ABOUT THE BED. IT HAD BEEN FOUND IN A LOCKED ROOM IN THE BASEMENT OF SAINT AMELIA'S ORPHANAGE....

SAINT AMELIA'S HAD STOOD AT SIXTH AND GLENDON FOR MORE THAN SIXTY YEARS, BUT IT WAS AS IT IT HAD NEVER EXISTED....

I CALLED CHURCHES CONVENTS, THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE. I FINALLY FOUND THE LAST SURVIVING PERSON TO BE EMPLOYED AT SAINT AMELIA'S....

SISTER CARMELA?

YES?

I HOPE YOU'LL PARDON ME... BUT I HAVE SOME DIFFICULT QUESTIONS TO ASK YOU.

THEY CONCERN A CHILD YOU MAY HAVE KNOWN... A LITTLE GIRL NAMED SARAH BRANNIGAN.

SARAH? OF COURSE. I KNEW THAT CHILD, BUT HOW COULD YOU KNOW ABOUT HER? POOR SARAH DIED MANY YEARS BEFORE YOU WERE BORN.

SISTER CARMELA.. TALKED TO SARAH.. JUST LAST NIGHT...AND SHE WAS LOOKING FOR TOBY.

YOUNG MAN.... I THINK WE HAVE INTERESTING STORIES TO TELL EACH OTHER....

THIS IS TOBY. HE WAS ALL THE FAMILY SARAH BRANNIGAN EVER HAD.

SARAH'S PARENTS ABANDONED HER AT BIRTH, AND SHE SPENT HER ENTIRE LIFE AT SAINT AMELIA'S.

WHAT LITTLE THERE WAS OF IT.

HOW... HOW DID SHE DIE?

THERE WAS A FIRE IN ONE OF THE CLASSROOMS. SARAH HELPED THE OTHER CHILDREN ESCAPE.

SHE WAS THAT KIND OF CHILD.

BUT THE ROOF COLLAPSED BEFORE SHE COULD SAVE HERSELF AND SHE WAS HORRIBLY BURNED.

I TOOK HER TO HER BED. I GAVE HER TOBY. I TRIED TO MAKE HER AS COMFORTABLE AS POSSIBLE...

AND WE PRAYED TOGETHER.

"NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP
I PRAY THE LORD MY SOUL TO KEEP,
AND IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE,
I PRAY THE LORD MY SOUL TO TAKE."

SHE WENT TO SLEEP THAT NIGHT... AND SHE NEVER WOKE UP.

THE BED SARAH DIED IN.... YOU LOCKED IT UP IN THE BASEMENT OF SAINT AMELIA'S WHY?

NONE OF THE OTHER CHILDREN WOULD GO NEAR IT AND I DIDN'T HAVE THE HEART TO THROW IT AWAY.

THAT BED WAS ALL I HAD LEFT... OF SARAH.

NOT QUITE ALL

YOU ALSO HAD TOBY.

TAKE HIM WITH YOU, MISTER MOLANO. IF SARAH COMES BACK TO YOU TONIGHT....

... GIVE TOBY TO HER. IT'S ONLY RIGHT THAT SHE HAVE HIM BACK.

ONLY RIGHT? THE GOD YOU SO CAREFULLY PRAYED TO LET SARAH HAUNT THAT TINY BED IN A DARK BASEMENT FOR SIXTY YEARS.

WHAT'S RIGHT ABOUT THAT?

WHY DID HE ABANDON HER? WHY DIDN'T HE TAKE HER SOUL?

PERHAPS THE LORD KNEW SHE HAD ANOTHER DESTINY AHEAD OF HER.

I CHECKED MY DAUGHTER OUT OF THE HOSPITAL THAT AFTERNOON

I BROUGHT HER HOME.

THE DOCTORS GAVE ME NO TROUBLE ABOUT IT. THEY SAID KATHY WAS ALREADY LEGALLY DEAD. THEY ALSO SAID HER HEART WOULD STOP BEATING WITHIN A DAY WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THE MACHINES.

BUT I DIDN'T NEED A FULL DAY.

I DISMISSED THE AMBULANCE AND CARRIED KATHY INTO OUR HOUSE MYSELF.

KATHY WAS SO QUIET AND STILL...

DOUBT TORE THROUGH ME, BUT IT WAS TOO LATE TO STOP.

WE WERE COMMITTED.... BOTH OF US.

THAT NIGHT, TOBY AND I SAT BESIDE SARAH'S BED.

AND WE WATCHED KATHY SLEEP

"IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE, I PRAY THE LORD MY SOUL TO TAKE."

KATHY. MY POOR KATHY.

I FELL ASLEEP BEFORE SUNRISE.

KATHY? KATHY?

MY GOD.

I HAD DREAMED IT ALL. I NEVER TALKED TO SARAH. THERE ARE NO GHOSTS. THERE IS NO GOD....

DADDY?

DADDY?

CAN I HAVE TOBY BACK?

IS THIS MY DAUGHTER? OR IS IT SARAH? I DO NOT CARE.

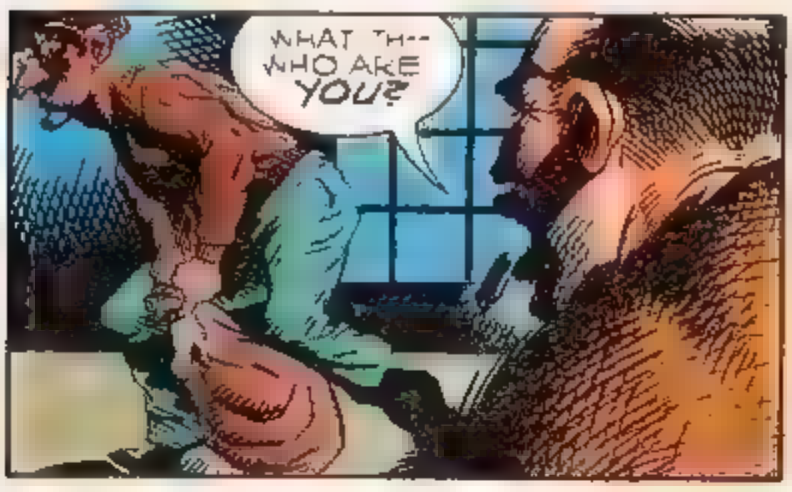
A MIME 11:21 NOW

SHE DIED BEFORE SHE WOKE. THE LORD DID NOT HER SOUL TAKE.

HE GAVE HER TO ME

...TWO FOR THE SHOW!

YOUR NAME IS FRANK PETERS YOU ARE ATTENDING THE ANNUAL COSTUME PARTY AT THE VAN PELT ESTATE. SUDDENLY, UNEXPECTEDLY, YOU FIND...

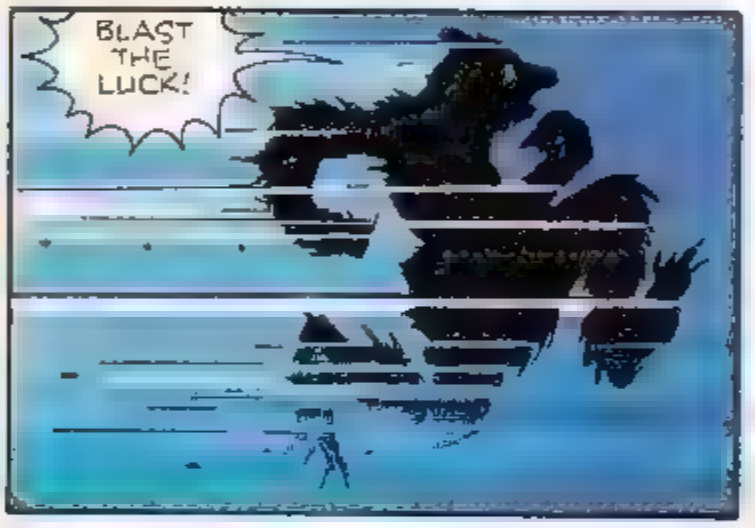


YOU STRUGGLE WITH THE SNEAK THIEF AND HE SOON LIES DEAD AT YOUR FEET YOU START FOR THE POLICE WHEN A SUDDEN THOUGHT OCCURS

YOU STUFF THE STOLEN GEMS IN TO YOUR COSTUME, DON THE HEADPIECE, AND GO OUT AMONG THE OTHER PARTY GUESTS. YOUR PLAN WORKS PERFECTLY

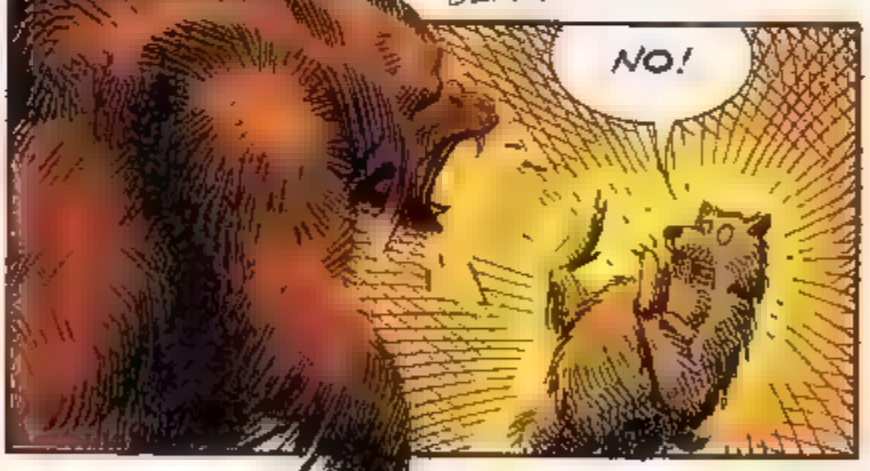
MOMENTS LATER YOU ARE OUTSIDE BUT AS YOU HEAD FOR YOUR CAR...

ONLY ONE THING TO DO: YOU PLUNGE DEEP INTO THE THICK, CANADIAN WOODS AND TRY TO CUT ACROSS THE MAIN HIGHWAY

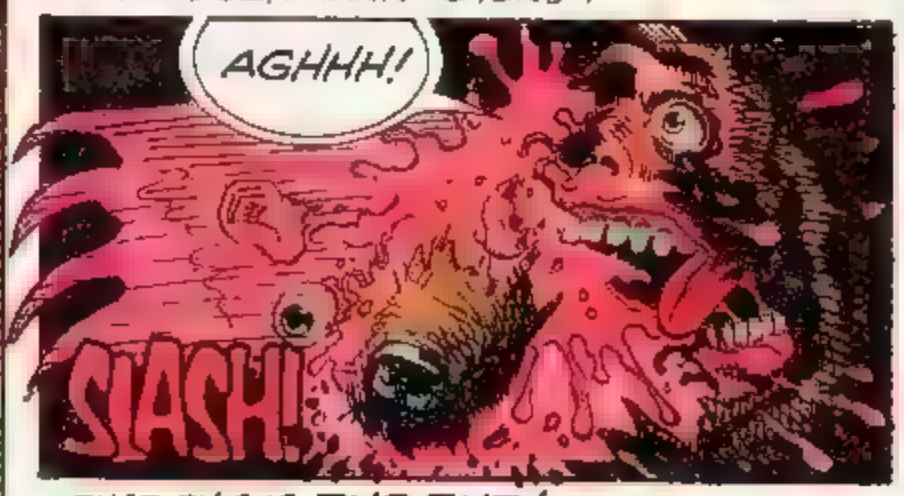


YOU BLUNDER THROUGH THE DENSE BRUSH AND SKID TO A TERRIFIED HALT A HUGE GRIZZLY BEAR AND HER CUB STAND BEFORE YOU

EVEN AS VAN PELT JEALOUSLY GUARDED HIS JEWELRY, A FEMALE GRIZZLY WILL GUARD HER FAMILY AGAINST ANY OTHER BEAR



AND AS THE DAGGER-LIKE CLAWS RIP INTO YOUR FLESH AND YOUR LIFE'S BLOOD SOAKS THROUGH THE TATTERED PARTY COSTUME, YOU REALIZE, FRANK PETERS,



THAT THIS IS THE END!

STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: BILL WRAY COLORS: CHRIS MILLER

ORIGINAL ARTWORK

"OUT OF HIS DEPTH"

THE PALE BALEFUL EYE OF THE OCTOBER MOON PEEKED HESITANTLY THROUGH THE RAGGED LINE OF CLOUDS CASTING ITS LUMINESCENCE OVER THE DESERTED CAMP GROUNDS. THE ROSY CHEEKED LOG BURNING BATTALION OF YOUNG GIRLS WHO HAD FLASHED MERRILY ACROSS CAMP GRANADA'S SHORTS AND LONG DEPARTED. TRADING THE SPARK AND FLAME OF ROLLING ARTERY COURSE FOR THE DREARY TEDIUM OF HIGH SCHOOL CLASS ROOMS AND TEACHERS' FATES. THE AUTUMN BREEZE SIGHED ITS LONELINESS OVER THE PLACID SURFACE OF LAKE GRANADA. DOWN BELOW ITS DULL COLORED DEPTHS A FAT WALLEYE LURKED CLOSE BY OVER THE SILT BED. AT THE LAKE'S BOTTOM SOMETHING STIRRED IN THE THICK SILT. THERE SOMETHING WAS DEAD AND ROTTED AND OBSCENE POKED ITS WAY UPWARD FROM THE MUCK TOWARD THE GENTLY ROLLING SURFACE. SOMETHING LONG DEAD... YET HIDEOUSLY ALIVE...

OUT OF HIS DEPTH

ALFREDO P. ALCALA

SKELETAL FINGERS GROPED UPWARD FOLLOWED BY A MAGGOTY DECAYED FOREARM, TATTERED REMNANTS OF SHIRT SLEEVE, AND AT LAST THE GRINNING MOCKERY OF A HUMAN SKULL

IN MOMENTS THE THING STOOD FREE OF ITS WATERY GRAVE, SWAYING UNCERTAINLY ON FEEBLE LEGS. IT LISTED TO AND FRO HEAD AS IF SEEKING DIRECTION. SPONGE-LIKE PARTS OF PUTRESCENT FLESH FLOATED AWAY ON THE CURRENT THEN THE THING TURNED EASTWARD AND BEGAN TO MOVE...

STORY BRUCE JONES ART ALFREDO ALCALA

SHARON BANNON SAT ON THE EDGE OF THE DOCK WATCH ING THE LAUGHING STREAMING FORMS OF THE CAMPERS FROLICKING IN THE SUN-DRENCHED SURFACE OF LAKE GRANADA. SHE HEAVED A SIGH OF WEARY RESIGNATION AND PICKED UP HER SILVER WHISTLE

FOUR SUMMERS NOW SHE HAD SERVED AT CAMP GRANADA AS SWIMMING INSTRUCTOR FOUR SUMMERS NOW SHE HAD WASTED HER TIME ON YOUNG GIRLS WHEN SHE COULD HAVE BEEN IN THE CITY FINDING A PROSPECTIVE HUSBAND...

ALL RIGHT GIRLS LUNCH TIME

SHE WAS TWENTY-NINE YEARS OLD AND SHE WASN'T GETTING ANY YOUNGER. MORE AND MORE SHE FOUND HERSELF GAZING WISTFULLY AT THE SUMMER BLOOMS AND TANNED BODIES BLAZING PAST HER ON THE DOCK... BODIES THAT WOULD, IN THREE MONTHS, FIND THEMSELVES IN CROWDED CLASSROOMS WITH BOYS.

BUT JOBS WERE SCARCE THESE DAYS... AS SCARCE AS MEN IN HER LIFE...

LO MISS BANNON!

OH HELLO CHUCK WILLIE...

I SUPPOSE I COULD GET THE BOYS TO GET OFF TONIGHT, MISS BANNON I WAS UH WONDERING IF YOU'D LIKE TO TAKE A LITTLE DRIVE MEBBE...

N-NOT TONIGHT WILLIE GAS... I HAVE TO DO SOME PAPER WORK

SHE STEPPED INTO THE MESS HALL BEHIND THE BLEACHERS AND TURNED AS MISS WATKINS THE OTHER COUNSELOR CAUGHT UP...

HAVE A NICE MORNING SWIM SHARON? ALL THE GIRLS ACCOUNTED FOR?

ALL ACCOUNTED FOR, MISS WATKINS.

THE NEW ADMINISTRATOR'S DUE TOMORROW SHARON WE WANT TO LOOK OUR BEST YOU KNOW?

YES MISS WATKINS

CAMP GRANADA

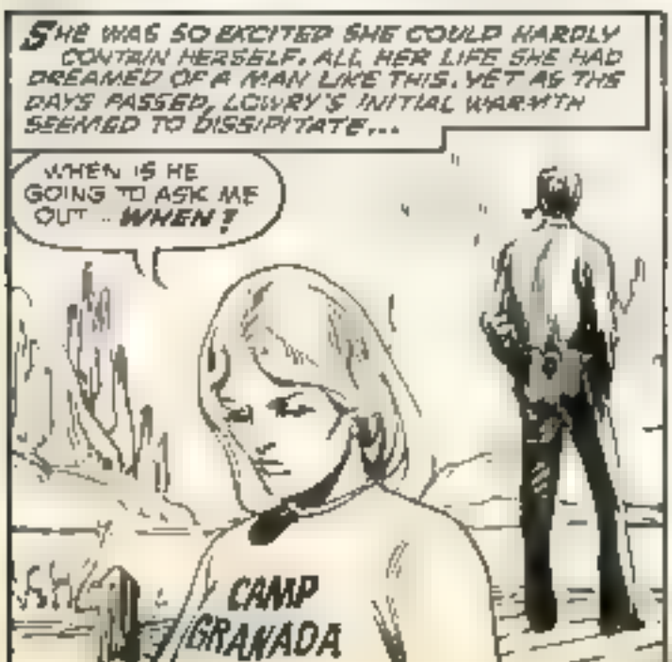
AND THAT NIGHT, AS ON ALL NIGHTS, THE LONELINESS AND SOLITUDE PRESSED IN AROUND HER WITH THE HOT SULTRY SUMMER BREEZES...
WHEN, SOB WILL SOMEONE TAKE ME AWAY FROM THIS? SOMEONE HANDSOME AND STRONG AND RICH..

AND THEN THE NEXT BRIGHT MORNING..
OH SHARON! PLEASE COME HERE A MOMENT. I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET SOMEONE!

THIS IS MISTER LOWRY SHARON OUR NEW ADMINISTRATOR HE'S GOING TO BE WITH US THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER! I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT SHOW HIM AROUND!
HELLO SHARON!
HELLO..

SHARON FELT HER HEART LEAP TO HER THROAT. SHE STAMMERED LIKE A SCHOOL GIRL. MR. LOWRY WAS TOO BEAUTIFUL TO BE BELIEVED.
.. AND CAMP GRANADA'S PROPERTY EXTENDS ALL THE WAY TO THE RIDGE
IT CERTAINLY IS A LOVELY VIEW SHARON..

VERY LOVELY INDEED!


SHE WAS SO EXCITED SHE COULD HARDLY CONTAIN HERSELF. ALL HER LIFE SHE HAD DREAMED OF A MAN LIKE THIS. YET AS THE DAYS PASSED, LOWRY'S INITIAL WARMTH SEEMED TO DISSIPITATE...
WHEN IS HE GOING TO ASK ME OUT.. WHEN!
CAMP GRANADA

EVENING MR. LOWRY.. LOVELY NIGHT...
GOOD EVENING SHARON. YES, VERY!

PACIFIC COMICS

FRUSTRATION PILED ON FRUSTRATION, YET LOMMY REFUSED TO NIBBLE. SHARON WAS FINALLY OBLIGED TO TRY THE OLD JEALOUSY ROUTINE...
I OH GOT THE NIGHT OFF MISS BANNON, F YER FREE...
WHY THANK YOU WILLIE I'D ADORE A MOONLIT CANOE RIDE..
IT WAS A HIGH PRICE TO PAY. SHE HAD BEEN WITH WILLIE ONCE BEFORE... AND ONCE HAD BEEN ENOUGH..
PLEASE MISS BANNON I'D DO ANYTHING FOR YOU! JEST ONE LI' KISS?..
CHOKE. WILLIE, DON'T YOU EVER GAG, TAKE A BATH? THE SMELL.
FINALLY THOUGH IT PAID OFF..
I HAVE SOME TIME OFF TONIGHT SHARON. I THOUGHT PERHAPS IF YOU WERE-
YES! I'D LOVE TO!
AND THINGS HAD GONE JUST AS SHE'D HOPED..
SHARON..
OH JEFF.. I WAS BEGINNING TO THINK YOU'D NEVER ASK!
...EXACTLY AS SHE'D HOPED...
YES!... OH JEFF ME!. LOVE ME DARLING... LOVE ME!
IT WOULD ONLY BE A QUESTION OF TIME NOW SHE FELT SURE, BEFORE HE POPPED THE QUESTION...
MISS BANNON? I GET OFF WORK EARLY TONIGHT. I THOUGHT IF MEBE YOU WERE FREE..
I I M.. GAG... SORRY WILLIE... I'M GOING TO BE TIED UP FOR QUITE SOME TIME NOW.. CHOKE.
PLEASE MISS BANNON I KNOW I'M NOT HANDSOME LIKE HIM, BUT I LOVE YOU! I'D GIVE ANYTHING I OWN JUS' TO TOUCH YOU.. TO KISS YOU...
WILLIE STOP IT!.. GAG.. DON'T TALK LIKE THAT.' LORD... CHOKE THE SMELL.'

THEN CAME THE AWFUL DAY IN MID-SUMMER ... THE WORST DAY OF HER LIFE ..
TEE-HEE! SHE SAID
WHAT'S THIS? SOMETHING APPEARED OVER THE HILL FROM THE BOY'S CAMP?
JEFF
SHARON
MISS BANNON
HOW COULD YOU ... AND HOW COULD YOU!
SHARON WHAT
SHE SAID BLANKLY, HYSTERICALLY. A DISTRACTION, TRYING TO HER EYES
HOW COULD HE ... FOR ...
MISS BANNON? WHAT IS IT? WHAT'D HE DO TO YOU?
WILLIE HAD TAKEN HER INSIDE ... GIVEN HER A GLASS OF ... HE ... ONCE ... HE ... SAID ... HE ... HE ... HE

AND BEFORE THE EVENING WAS OUT, SHE WAS BACK IN FAMILIAR ARMS ... STRONG ARMS ... AND SHE WAS FORGIVING ... AND BEGGING FORGIVENESS IN RETURN ...

YOU MARRIED THE CREEP?

OH JEFF IT WAS HORRIBLE HIS TOUCH HIS GASP SMELL!

WAIT A SECOND DO YOU REALIZE THAT YOU JUST MARRIED YOURSELF A VERY RICH MAN?

WILLIE RICH? DON'T BE RIDICULOUS!

DIDN'T YOU KNOW THAT THIS CAMP WAS BUILT ON WILLIE'S LAND? MISS WATKINS PAID HIM QUITE A TIDY SUM FOR IT AS I RECALL NOW IF SOMETHING SHOULD HAPPEN TO POOR OLD WILLIE ... AN ACCIDENT MAYBE ...

JEFF WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

WE COULD BE RICH BABY WE COULD BE IN EASY STREET! YOU'D INHERIT EVERYTHING BUT YOU'VE GOT TO DO IT, SHARON! YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE AN ACCIDENT!

Y-YES JEFF ANYTHING YOU SAY ...

SO SHARON RETURNED TO WILLIE ... BESET FOR FORGIVENESS AFTER THAT NIGHT AND SUGGESTED A NICE MOONLIT CANOE RIDE THE KIND WILLIE ALWAYS LIKED ...

SO WATKINS LET ME STAY ON AFTER I SOLD HER THE LAND, ON ACCOUNT A I HAD NOWHERE TO GO, 'SIDES, IT'S SO PRETTY HERE ...

LOOK WILLIE LOOK DOWN HERE A BIG FISH.

WHERE? I DON'T SEE NO F-

UM FORGIVE ME WILLIE ...

WILLIE TUMBLED OVER THE SIDE ... BUT NOT UNCONSCIOUS AS SHARON HAD PLANNED. WILLIE COULDN'T SWIM SHARON WATCHED IN HORROR AS HE CLAWED THE NIGHT AIR ... AS HIS EYES BULGED ... AS THE LAKE WATER POURED INTO HIS LUNGS.

GLK ... EH-SHARON! ... GLUG! ...

WILLIE SHUDDERS

SHE ROWED AWAY FROM THE FLAILING BODY PLANNED BACK TO WILLIE'S CABIN AND PHONED CHERY.

OH JEFF IT WAS AWFUL

OKAY BABY NOW ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS WAIT FOR THE BODY TO RISE, THEN YOU CAN CLAIM YOUR INHERITANCE AND WE CAN BE MARRIED SO I'D GREAT SWEETHEART.

WEEKS PASSED... TERRIBLE-LONELY WEEKS WHEN SHARON NEEDED TO BE HELD AND COMFORTED... BUT STILL, WILLIE'S BODY DIDN'T RISE... THEN, AT LAST, CAMP ENDED...

GOODBYE MISS BANNON! SEE YOU NEXT YEAR!

HAVE A GOOD WINTER MR. LOWRY

PACIFIC

BUT IF SHARON COULDN'T PLAY THE GRIEVING WIDOW, THEN SHE COULD CERTAINLY PLAY — THE DEMANDING WIFE...

I'M SORRY BUT I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANY MONEY--

BUT SHE'S HIS WIFE IT SAYS SO RIGHT HERE ON THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE!

OH YES SIR I CAN SEE THAT BUT WILLIE CAMPBELL WITHREW ALL HIS MONEY FROM THIS BANK SEVERAL WEEKS AGO!

IT WAS NIGHT WHEN THEY REACHED THE EMPTY CAMP GROUNDS.

NOT SO FAST, JEFF!

HE MUST HAVE STASHED IT IN THAT CABIN. WHERE ELSE COULD IT BE?

THE THING LUMBERED INTO THE NARROW ROAD, LOWRY'S HEADLIGHTS REFLECTING OFF THE SLIME-ENGORGED WORMS CRAWLING OVER ITS DECAYED FLESH.

YAGGHH!!

LOWRY SAW THE CAR CRASHING INTO A TREE. SHARON SCREAMED AS THE ROTTING HULK TEETERED TOWARD THE SMOKING RUBBLE AND PULLED HER LOVER FROM BEHIND THE WHEEL.

IT'S WILLIE! YAGHH! HELP ME!

SHARON STOOD TRANSFIXED IN HORROR AS THE THING PULLED THE SHRIEKING LOWRY DOWN THE BANK TOWARD THE WAITING LAKE...

SHARON! HELP ME!

SHE WATCHED AS THE GIBBERING JOE ENTY DRAGGED HIM INTO THE TEPID WATER... WATCHED AS LOWRY'S EYES BULGED... AS HIS LUNGS FILLED...

SHARO— GHuP!...

SHE SPUN ABOUT AT LAST AND RAN... RAN ACROSS THE DESERTED CAMPGROUNDS... RAN TO THE NEAREST CABIN SHE COULD FIND.

GASP WILLIE'S CABIN,

THE DOOR WAS ALREADY OPEN. A FETID RANK SMELL OF DECAY PERMEATED THE CABIN'S INTERIOR

THE CHOKE THE BED. THE SHEETS ARE TURNED DOWN!

SHARON SAT DOWN HEAVILY ON WILLIE'S LUMPY MATTRESS... HER EYES WERE WIDE AND GLAZED...

"...WAITING FOR ME... HEH HEH... WAITING FOR ME TO RETURN...

SHE SAT QUIETLY STARING INTO SPACE ...THERE WAS A MOTE MENT OUTSIDE THE DOOR...

...HEH-HEH... WAITING FOR WHAT HE ALWAYS WANTED.

SHARON LAY BACK ON THE BED. AN EVEN STRONGER STENCH OF PUTRESCENT FLESH WAFTED INTO THE ROOM.

HEH HEH... SHOULD HAVE LET HIM HAVE ME HEH-HEH-

...WHEN HE DON'T SMELL SO BAD! HEH-HEH.

ALL IS SILENT AT THE TWO CABIN... THEN A RUSTLING SOUND... FOLLOWED BY A FINAL AGONIZING SCREAM...

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

...THEN SILENCE ONCE AGAIN... FOREVER...

END

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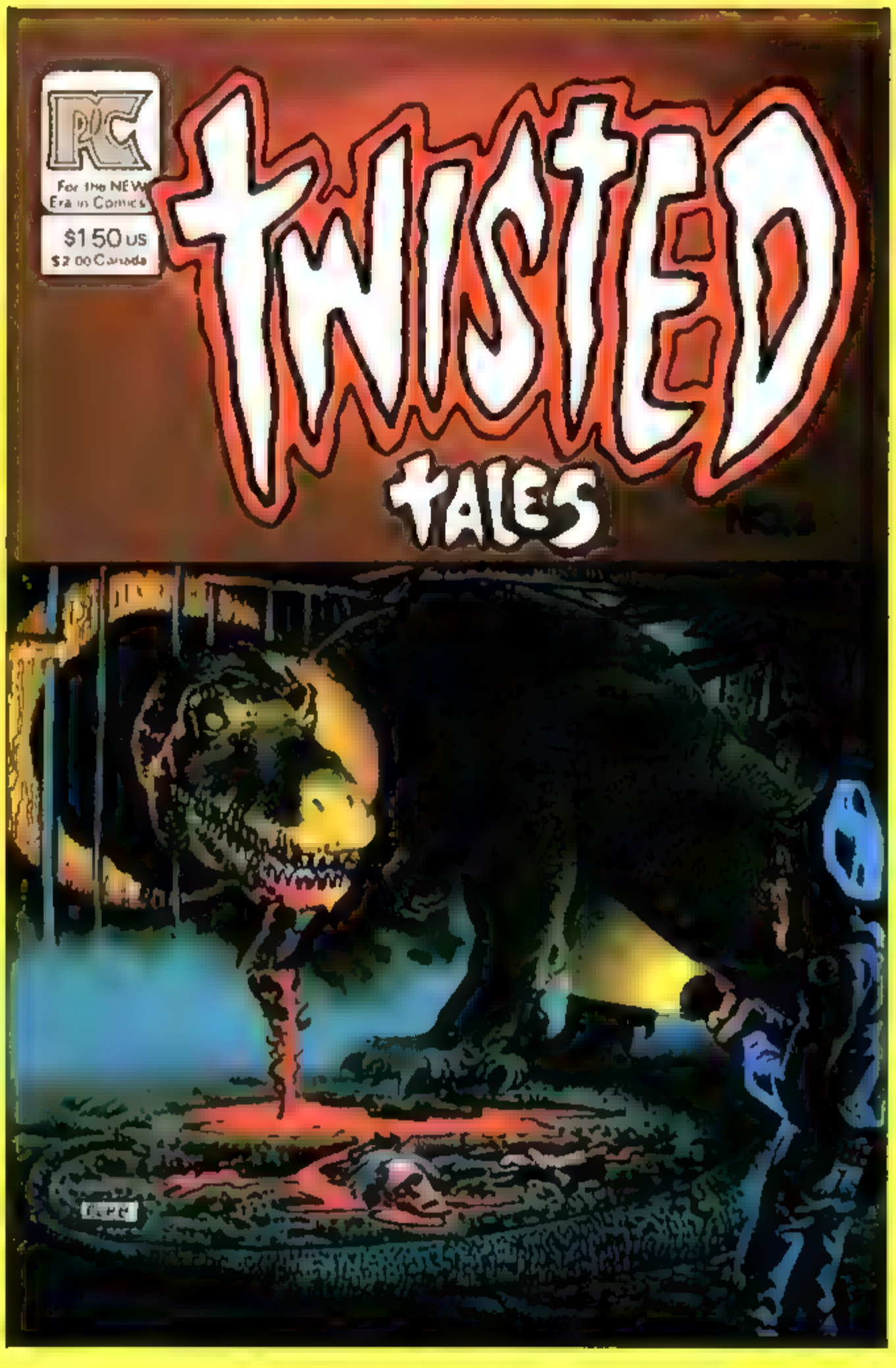

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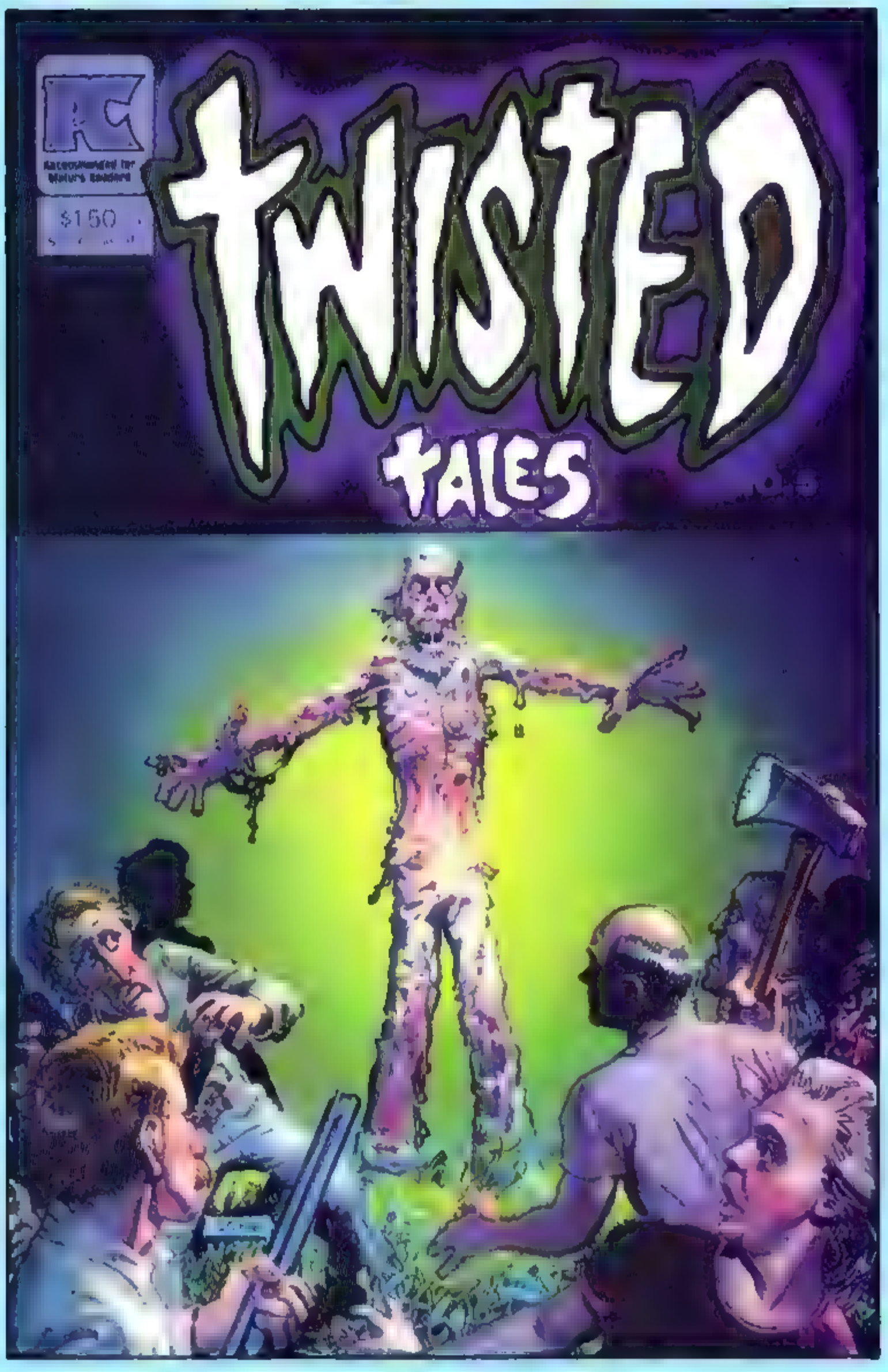

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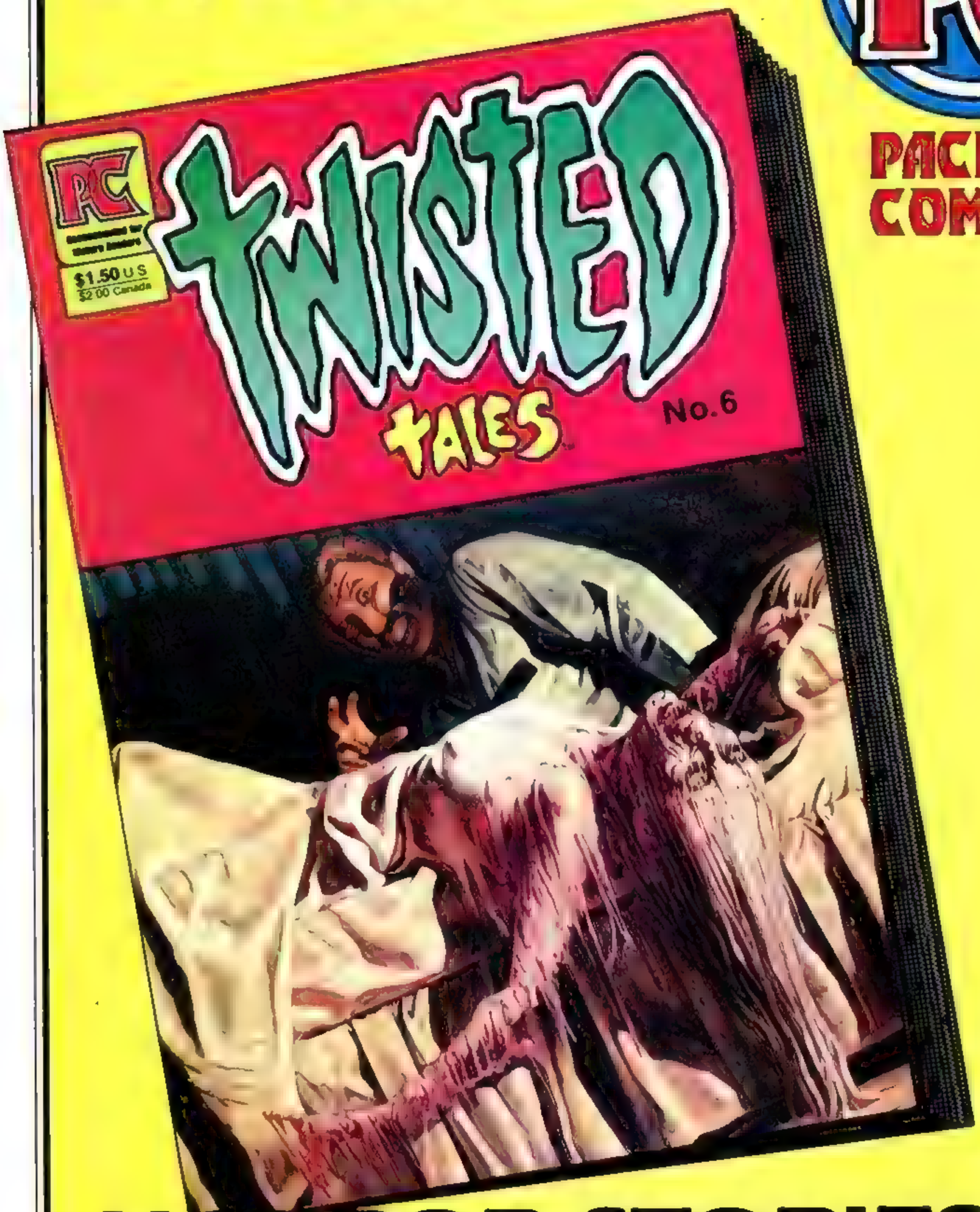

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ON SALE SOON!

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NEW DIMENSIONS in TERROR!

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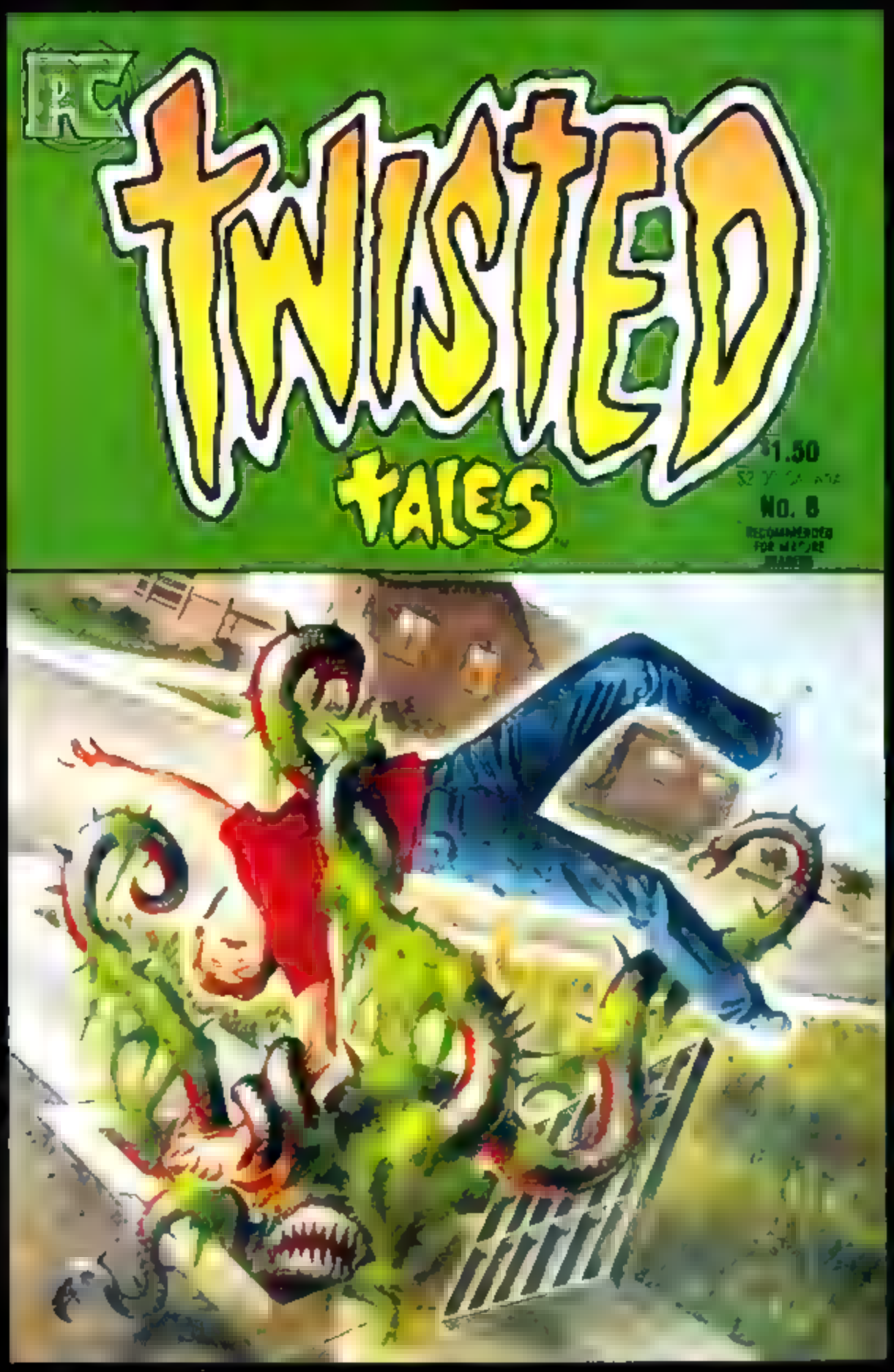

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